

Once Present, Now Past

David Sanson

2010–10–13

The present simply is the real considered in relation to two particular species of unreality, namely the past and the future. [prior1970, p. 245]

1 Introduction

Many philosophers think that reality is static. The basic questions—what is there? how are things?—have permanent or timeless answers, because reality itself is permanent or timeless.¹ To suppose otherwise is to treat an aspect of our perspective on reality as though it were a feature of reality itself. Fundamental metaphysics, on this view, traffics in a pure realm of permanent objects and permanent facts.²

Some of us think instead that reality is dynamic. Those basic questions—what is there? how are things?—do not have permanent or timeless answers, because, as time passes, things come into and go out of existence, gain and lose properties, join into and break off relations. Fundamental metaphysics, on this view, is ensnared in a messy flux of temporary objects and temporary facts.³

The view that reality is dynamic has consequences for how we think about past, present, and future. The quote from Prior above suggests the basic picture: what is real is present, what was real is past, and what will be real is future. The aim of this paper is to work out some consequences of this way of thinking about the past, as a “species of unreality” to be understood in contrast to the present. In particular, I argue that, if reality is dynamic, the past is both explanatorily ineliminable—it does work that nothing else can do—and unreal.

¹Technically, the basic questions are ‘what is there really?’ and ‘how are things really?’, where ‘really’ flags the fact that the questions are about metaphysical reality. For an explanation of why something like this is needed, see [fine2005a; siderWTBW].

²This position is sometimes referred to as the *tenseless* theory or the *B-theory*; permanent or timeless facts are sometimes referred to as *tenseless* facts; proponents are sometimes called *detensors* or *B-theorists*.

³This position is sometimes referred to as *serious tensing* or *A-theory*; temporary facts are sometimes referred to as *tensed* facts; proponents are sometimes called (*serious*) *tensors* or *A-theorists*.

These are not two independent claims: to do the explanatory work we need it to do, I want to say, the past must be no part of reality.

2 Temporary Reality and Real Change

Most of us think that reality is contingent. And, more specifically, most of us think that there are contingent objects—objects that exist but might not have—and that there are contingent facts—facts that are the case but might not have been the case.

So, for example, Barack Obama exists, and he is the 44th President of the United States, but both his existence and his being 44th President are contingent.

Many of us are also willing to go a step further: it is not just that the existing things exist contingently, but that other things could have existed instead. And it is not just that what is the case might not have been, but that something else might have been the case instead.

So, for example, there are no purple cows, but there could have been purple cows, even though (plausibly) no (actually) existing thing could have been a purple cow.

Just as most of us think that reality is contingent, many of us think that reality is temporary. And, more specifically, we think that there are temporary objects—objects that exist but did not exist or will not exist—and that there are temporary facts—facts that are the case but once were not the case and soon will not be the case.⁴

So, for example, Barack Obama exists, and he is President of the United States, but both his existence and his being President are temporary.

And many of us are also willing to go a step further: it is not just that the existing things exist temporarily, but that other things once existed and yet other things will exist. And it is not just that some of the facts that are the case were not the case and will not be the case, but that some other facts were once the case and some other facts will be the case.

So, for example, there are no dinosaurs, but there were dinosaurs, even though (plausibly) no (presently) existing thing was a dinosaur.

These modal analogies are helpful, but they only go so far. In the modal case, there is no analogue of *change*. We might describe the view that reality is contingent as positing a certain kind of modal “instability”, but that is just a metaphor. But in the case of time, this sort of talk is more than mere metaphor.

⁴Temporary facts are often called *tensed* facts. But sometimes ‘tensed fact’ is used instead to describe facts that contain metaphysical constituents corresponding to the past or future tense, e.g., the fact that George Bush *was* President.

If reality is temporary, that is because things change. Everyone—even those who think that reality is static—will allow that there is some sense in which things change. But consider some temporary fact—say, the fact that you are reading this sentence. Wait! That fact is no more, because you are no longer reading that sentence. Where others treat this sort of change as a mere phenomena, to be analyzed in terms of some underlying structure of permanent facts, those of us who think that reality is temporary take this at face value: that fact was a temporary fact—here one minute, gone the next. So, if reality is temporary, that is because things *really* change.

It is this aspect of the view that I wish to draw our attention to when I describe the view as the view that reality is dynamic.

3 Restricted and Unrestricted Views

Growing Block Theorists think that reality is dynamic. But they think that, when it comes to real change, there is an important asymmetry: as time passes, new things and facts come to be, but old things and facts never cease to be. The universe, they say, has the structure of a four-dimensional space-time, consisting of all past and present things and facts, but no future things or facts. To be present, on this view, is to be among the most recent things or facts to have come to be. The temporally latest three-dimensional surface of the block is the present. As time passes—as new things and facts come to be—things and facts that once were present—once were on the “cutting edge” of reality—continue to exist even as they recede ever deeper into the block.

Eternalist A-theorists also think that reality is dynamic. Like the Growing Block Theorists, they put a restriction on real change. For them, however, the fundamental asymmetry is not between coming to be and ceasing to be, but between ontological change and alteration. Nothing ever comes into or goes out of existence, on their view; existence, they say, is timeless or eternal. But things do gain and lose properties.⁵ So, for example, they will say that a past object, like Socrates, exists; but has lost most of the properties he once had, e.g., *being a philosopher*.

Under the influence of McTaggart, a yet more restrictive version of Eternalist A-theory has been widely discussed: the *Moving Now Theory*. For the most part, the Moving Now Theorist rejects both real ontological change and real alteration. On her view, *most* instantiation is permanent; temporary instantiation is a privilege enjoyed by only three properties directly tied to the passage

⁵Williamson likewise suggests that existence is permanent, while allowing that *most* facts are temporary: Socrates always exists, but the only properties he has are the properties he has now. Properties like *being snubnosed*, *being human*, and *being a philosopher* are properties that he once had but has since lost.

of time: *being past*, *being present*, and *being future*.⁶ As time passes, each event or moment of time instantiates each of these properties in turn: first, it instantiates *being future*, then *being present*, then *being past*. Moreover, only one of these three properties—*being present*—is a property something can both gain and lose: *being future* can be lost but not regained; *being past* can be gained but not lost.

All three of these views face trouble if I can establish what I claim: that, given that reality is dynamic, the past must not be real. To the extent that such views posit a real past, I will argue, the past they posit cannot all the work that needs to be done. Once we introduce a past that can do that work, the real past that was posited becomes, at best, redundant.

In any case, it seems to me that once one has taken the plunge—once one has decided to embrace the view that reality is dynamic—these sorts of restrictions on real change should seem unnatural. The most natural view in the area is a view that allows for unrestricted real change. It posits no asymmetric restriction between coming to be and ceasing to be, and no asymmetric restriction between ontological change and alteration. Objects come into and go out of existence, gain and lose properties: these are all real changes.

4 Presentism and Real Change

This position—call it *Unrestricted Real Change*—is closely associated with, but not identical to, *Presentism*. *Presentism* is the view that the present is the whole of reality: the only things that exist are things that presently exist, the only properties things have are properties things presently have, the only facts are present facts.

Taken by itself, Presentism is consistent with the view that reality is static: it does not entail that reality is temporary or that there is any real change. Many theists describe God's existence in just these terms: he lives in an eternal, unchanging present.⁷

Taken by itself, Presentism is also consistent with the sorts restrictions on fundamental change considered above. For example, a Presentist could maintain that the only things that exist are uncreated immortal souls, so that nothing ever comes into or goes out of existence, while allowing that these souls gain and lose properties. It is hard to differentiate this sort of Presentist position from Eternalist A-theory.

⁶McTaggart, for example, suggests that existence is permanent, and most facts are permanent as well. The only temporary facts are facts concerning which events are past, present, or future: as time passes, an event that has the property *being future* loses that property and gains the property *being present*, and then loses *being present* and gains the property *being past*.

⁷Boethius, Aquinas, Leftow

Similarly, a Presentist could maintain that that the only things that exist are created immortal souls, and that, over time, these souls accumulate, but never lose, properties. Again, it is hard to differentiate this sort of Presentist position from the Growing Block Theory.

But most Presentists intend, I think, to endorse Unrestricted Fundamental Change.⁸

5 Presentism and Austerity

The partisans of time often take it with such Spartan seriousness that they deny existence to virtually all of it—to all of it, in short, but the infinitesimal pulse of the present. [williams1951@p. 458]

If one ignores the Presentist’s commitment to Unrestricted Real Change, it is natural to think of Presentism as an austere metaphysical view, of a kind with Nominalism and Mereological Nihilism. Indeed, a lot of the literature on Presentism reads this way: the project Presentists face is the project of finding a way to do without the past and future—to make do only with the present—in much the way that the project Nominalists face is the project of finding a way to do without universals—to make do only with particulars.

I think this emphasis is a mistake. The project facing Presentists is to make sense of the messy (ornate?) metaphysics of real change. The view that past and future are unreal should be seen as falling out of that project, and it is only when that is clearly in view that we should start thinking about where that leaves the status of past and future.

6 The Past

It remains to be shown that, if reality is dynamic, there is work to be done by the genuine past that cannot be done by any presently existing semblance of the past. The point is actually more general than that: if reality is dynamic, there is work to be done by the genuine past that cannot be done by any *existing* semblance of the past, whether present or not.

Because the point is more general, it will be convenient to begin by making the point in the context of a non-presentist tensor view—the “Moving Spotlight” theory of time—and then extending the point out from there.

⁸Similar comments apply to the relation between the Growing Block Theory and *Pastism*—the view that only the past and present are real. In principle, a Pastist need not endorse any fundamental change, and so need not endorse the Growing Block Theory.

7 How Does Your Spotlight Move?

According to the *Moving Spotlight* theory of time, most facts are permanent.⁹ Reality consists of a series of permanently existing events, permanently ordered from earlier to later. And for the most part, these events instantiate their properties permanently. As McTaggart says,

Take any event—the death of Queen Anne, for example—and consider what changes can take place in its characteristics. That it is a death, that it is the death of Anne Stuart, that it has such causes, that it has such effects—every characteristic of this sort never changes. “Before the stars saw one another plain,” the event in question was the death of a Queen. [mctaggart1927a@p. 13]

The only temporary facts, on this view, are facts concerning which events are past, present, and future. These facts change as the property *being present* “moves” down the series of events, “somewhat like the spot of light from a policeman’s bull’s-eye traversing the fronts of the houses in a street” [broad1923@p. 59].

8 Snapshots

Snapshots are useful heuristic devices for thinking about dynamic views. A snapshot is a picture or diagram of “the sum total of reality,” a diagram, in other words, which displays all the fundamental facts—both ontological and ideological.¹⁰

On a tenseless theory, you’d get the same snapshot no matter when you took it, in much the same way that you’d get the same map of the United States no matter where you were when you drew it up. This is because on a tenseless theory, the fundamental facts are not temporary: they don’t vary with time.

But on a dynamic theory, you’ll get a different snapshot depending on when you “take it”. For example, assuming the Moving Spotlight theory is correct, if we take a snapshot right now, we will get something like this:

Snapshot 1: Moving Spotlight Theory

$$\dots E_1 \rightarrow \mathbf{E_2} \rightarrow E_3 \rightarrow E_4 \dots$$

⁹The view sketched below closely matches McTaggart’s famous description of the A-series [mctaggart1927a@p. 10–13].

¹⁰My “snapshots” are essentially the same as Storrs McCall’s “universe-pictures” [mccall1976a@p. 340].

In Snapshot 1, we see a series of events, E_1 through E_4 . The arrows between them indicate the earlier-to-later relations that hold between them.¹¹ The use of boldface indicates which event—in this case, E_2 —has the property *being present*.

But now suppose, having waited a moment, we take a second snapshot. We will get something like this:

Snapshot 2: Moving Spotlight Theory

$$\dots E_1 \rightarrow E_2 \rightarrow \mathbf{E}_3 \rightarrow E_4 \dots$$

The property *being present* “sweeps” along the series of events, and our new snapshot reflects this: E_2 no longer instantiates the property being present; it has lost that property, and E_3 instantiates it instead.

Snapshots 1 and 2 are not just two different pictures of the same underlying reality as seen from two different perspectives. As representations of how things are, they contradict each other. According to Snapshot 1, E_2 , but not E_3 , has the property being present. According to Snapshot 2, E_3 , but not E_2 , has the property being present. So they can’t both be right—at least, not together.¹² But if the world is dynamic, then it can be the case that, first, one of them gets things right, but then things change, so that now, the second one gets things right. Assuming that the Moving Spotlight theory is correct, this is precisely what happens, and our two snapshots accurately reflect this.

9 The Once Present and the Now Past

Now, just looking at Snapshot 2, there is an obvious account to be given of what it is for an event to be past: an event is past just in case it bears the *earlier-than* relation to some event which instantiates the property *being present*. So, in particular, given this account, E_2 is past, because it bears the *earlier than* relation to E_3 , which instantiates the property *being present*.

This account of *being past* is “internal to the snapshot”: it appeals only to what properties and relations things instantiate, according to Snapshot 2: the instantiation of the *earlier than* relation between E_2 and E_3 , together with the instantiation of *being present* by E_3 .¹³

¹¹The snapshot suggests a discrete rather than continuous sequence of events, but nothing in what follows hinges on that.

¹²but see [fine2005a].

¹³I will tend to use ‘current’ and ‘present’ differently. In a non-presentist tensed world, it will usually be the case that there currently are more things than there presently are, because the present is thought of as being just one part of the current state of the world as represented by the current snapshot. In a presentist tensed world—the kind of view I will ultimately advocate—this distinction between the current and the present collapses. But we need it when we consider tensed theories in general.

But there is a second way of thinking about what it is to be past in this context: E_2 is past because it once instantiated the property *being present*. Rather than considering the properties and relations E_2 has according to Snapshot 2, consider Snapshot 1: Snapshot 1 does not represent how things are, but it does represent how things once were. Consider, then, how things once were, and contrast that with how things are.

More precisely, given a Moving Spotlight Theory, there are two accounts available for what it is for an event to be past:

The now-past E_2 is past iff it is earlier than an event that has the property *being present*.

The once-present E_2 is past iff it instantiated the property *being present*.

The first account—the now-past—treats the past in terms of how things are: in terms of the properties (and relations) E_2 has. The second conception—the once-present—treats the past in terms of how things were: in terms of the properties E_2 had.

Which of these is the “genuine past”? It seems clear that the once-present is the genuine past: the now-past is trace of the once-present.¹⁴ But my argument here does not depend on this. What I wish to establish is that there is important work that cannot be done by the now-past, and can only be done by the once-present.

10 Deviant dynamic Structures

To see this, we need to consider situations in which the now-past and the once-present come apart. The Moving Spotlight Theorist should maintain that this can’t happen: every event which is now-past was once-present. The challenge she faces is to make good on this claim—to show that she can rule out these deviant structures. My claim is that she can only do so by appealing to the once-present.

Suppose the world is as described by the Moving Spotlight theory, except that the property *being present*, as it sweeps down the series of events, skips over E_2 . So E_2 is now-past—it is earlier than some event which is present—but it never instantiated the property *being present*, so it is not once-present.

A snapshot taken when E_3 is present will look like this:

Snapshot 2: Skip-a-Day

... $E_1 \rightarrow E_2 \rightarrow \mathbf{E_3} \rightarrow E_4$...

¹⁴for more on this, see [sanson2010a].

This snapshot looks exactly the same as the Snapshot we imagined taking when E_3 was present, given the Moving Spotlight theory. The difference between that case—the case in which E_2 is both now-past and once-present—and this deviant case—the case in which E_2 is now-past but was not once-present—is not a difference that shows up in the snapshot taken when E_3 is present.

Suppose we ask the Moving Spotlight theorist to explain how her view differs from this odd Skip-a-Day view. What can she say? The difference does not appear to lie in how things are—as represented by the current snapshots. But how things are, as represented by the current snapshots, is suppose to be the whole of reality.

But the difference is a real difference and an important difference. It is a real and important difference that requires, for its explanation, that one reach beyond what is real and point to what was real but no longer is. It is an important difference that must be explained by pointing to that past, understood not in terms of some currently existing semblance of the past (i.e., the now-past), but to the no longer existing genuine past.

It is easy to multiply these examples.

Suppose someone insists that events earlier than 6000 years ago exist, and are earlier than subsequent events, but denies that those events ever instantiated the property *being present*? Is the Moving Spotlight theorist a (slightly heterodox) Young Earth Creationist of this sort? To establish that she is not, she must point beyond the (temporary) sum total of reality, to a sum total of reality that no longer is.

Suppose that $E_{1.5}$ —an event between E_1 and E_2 —instantiates *being present* for a moment in the usual way. But when $E_{1.5}$ stops instantiating *being present* it ceases to exist, and ceases to stand in any relations to any other events. Once again the sum total of reality as of E_3 will match that posited by the Moving Spotlight theory. Once again, the Moving Spotlight theorist cannot rule out this sort of behavior without pointing beyond how things are.

Someone might say that, since the deviant dynamic structures I have described are metaphysically impossible, they can safely be ignored. But exactly what is it that makes them metaphysically impossible? It is not metaphysically impossible that things be as they are represented as being in any given Snapshot. The metaphysical impossibility—if it is one—lies in the connections between what is represented in one snapshot and what is represented in another. But this sort of connection is precisely what cannot be captured in single snapshot. (There can be a semblance or record of this connection, but that simply pushes the problem back: what guarantees that it is an accurate semblance or record?)

11 Static Structures

In addition to deviant dynamic structures, there are tenseless structures that the Moving Spotlight theorist cannot rule out unless she points beyond how things are.

There is nothing to stop a detenser from proposing that a particular event is special: it has a property that no other events have. Suppose this detenser calls this property the property *being present*, and asserts that E_3 is the only event that has it:

Snapshot of a Tenseless Series with a Frozen Present

$$\dots E_1 \rightarrow E_2 \rightarrow \mathbf{E_3} \rightarrow E_4 \dots$$

How can the Moving Spotlight theorist distance herself from this character? It is hard to see how, short of reaching beyond how things and discussing how things were.¹⁵

It is natural to suppose that *being present* can only be had in a temporary way: nothing can be permanently present. Some have denied this: McTaggart thought that the last moment of time would be remain permanently present [mc-taggart1909]; some theologians claim that God enjoys a life lived in a permanent present [leftow2002].

But this response won't work if the aim is to avoid pointing beyond reality. To see this, ask yourself what it is about the property *being present* that accounts for its tensed nature. The only plausible answer invokes the once-present: unlike *being zero*, or *being the death of Elvis*, *being present* isn't the kind of property that a thing can have permanently. Indeed, it is part of what it is to be the property *being present* that events which once instantiated *being present* don't anymore and events which once failed to instantiate being present now do. In other words, what accounts for the tensed nature of *being present* is precisely its connection to the once-present. So we cannot avoid appeal to the once-present by resting weight instead on the tensed nature of *being present*.

Analogous remarks apply to *being earlier* than. It might be true that *being earlier than* is, like *being present*, by its very nature an indicator of a dynamic structure.¹⁶ Indeed, one plausible account of the earlier to later ordering of events, given a Moving Spotlight Theory, is that it just is the ordering induced

¹⁵This example is given by [sider2001@p. 22]. In the passage, Sider's aim is to show that a Growing Block theorist is committed to two tenses, one of which corresponds to my once-present, the other, my now-past.

¹⁶This seems to be the gist of McTaggart's criticism of Russell: according to Russell, the temporal order is a tenseless series of events from earlier to later. But, McTaggart argues, that relation can't be the temporal relation of earlier to later unless it is properly connected with real change (i.e., tensed instantiation) with respect to properties like being present [mc-taggart1927a@p. 14].

by the movement of *being present*. On this account, what makes it the case that E_1 is earlier than E_2 just is the fact that E_1 once instantiated *being present* and E_2 now instantiates *being present*.

Perhaps this is the right account for a Moving Spotlight theorist to give of the *earlier to later* relation. But it won't get her out of my dilemma: far from providing a way of doing without appeal to the once-present, this account makes the appeal to the once-present even more pervasive than one may have initially thought. In effect, a Moving Spotlight theorist who makes this move is taking the first step toward eliminating the redundant semblance of a past that her view posits.

12 Presentism Again

The problems just raised for the Moving Spotlight theory apply with equal force to the Growing Block theory.¹⁷ The problem arises for any tensor, with respect to whatever aspect of reality she takes to be temporary.

Applying the moral to presentism is a bit trickier. Suppose the world is a presentist world—the only fundamental facts are present facts—and suppose we repeat our thought experiment, taking two snapshots. Suppose, for the sake of concreteness, that we take our first snapshot in 2006, and that we take our second snapshot in 2010. Ignoring everything but the presidential status of George W. Bush and Barack Obama, here is what we would find:

<i>being President</i>	
Bush	Obama

Table 1: Snapshot 1: Presentism (circa 2006)

<i>being President</i>	
Bush	Obama

Table 2: Snapshot 2: Presentism (circa 2010)

According to Snapshot 1, Bush instantiates the property *being President*, and Obama does not. According to Snapshot 2, Obama instantiates *being President* and Bush does not.

For both the Moving Spotlight Theory and the Growing Block Theory, there were obvious materials in the current snapshot out of which to define a surrogate past. But in these presentist snapshots, there are no such materials. In the 2010

¹⁷see [sider2001@p. XXX; braddon-mitchell2004; heathwood2005; merricks2006a]

snapshot, for example, there is nothing that corresponds to the fact that Bush was President.

But presentists are adept at inflating the present to forgo the costs of their austerity. There are several ways to do this, but I'll consider here just one: *tensed properties presentism*.¹⁸ The tensed properties presentist introduces “tensed properties”, like the property *having been President*, into the mix.

It is called “tensed” not because it is a property that is only temporarily instantiated, but because our description of the property makes use of past tensed verb. This is an unfortunate confusion of terminology, but I don't know of any easy way to repair it. *having been President* is a past-oriented tensed property. Many presentists also make use of future-oriented tensed properties, like *going to be President*.

Once tensed properties are on the table, we once again have two ways of thinking about the past. On the one hand, we can think about the past in terms of the properties things instantiated: Bush, for example, instantiated *being President*. On the other hand, we can think about the past in terms of the tensed properties things now instantiate: Bush, for example, now instantiates the property *having been President*.

According to the tensed property presentist, then, our snapshots will have a bit more information:

<i>being President</i>	<i>going to be President</i>
Bush	Obama

Table 3: Snapshot 1: Tensed Properties Presentism (circa 2006)

<i>having been President</i>	<i>being President</i>
Bush	Obama

Table 4: Snapshot 2: Tensed Properties Presentism (circa 2010)

But the same problems arise for this view as arose for the analogous non-presentist views. What is it about Snapshot 2 that guarantees that Snapshot 1 is an accurate representation of how things once were? In other words, what is it about Bush's now instantiating the property *having been President* that tells us that he once instantiated the property *being President*?

I admit that this may sound like a strange question. Given that:

- (1) Bush instantiates the property *having been President*

¹⁸Tensed property presentists include ...

how could it not be that:

- (2) Bush instantiated the property *being President*.

After all, (1) and (2) look like two ways of saying the same thing.

But (1) and (2) only look like two ways of saying the same thing because of the label being used for the tensed property. To properly assess the relation between (1) and (2), we need to get past the label, and see what is actually involved in ascribing *having been President* to somebody.

I see three accounts that could be given of *having been President*.

First, *having been President* could be taken as a simple primitive property, so that the verbal complexity in the predicate is misleading. Given such an account, it does not seem that (1) and (2) are just two ways of saying the same thing. Indeed, it seems that, given such an account, we can imagine deviant dynamic structures, in which the present instantiation of *having been President* comes apart from the past instantiation of *being President*. Suppose that, while Bush now bears the property having been President, back in 2006, John Kerry was enjoying his first term in office, so that he, not Bush, instantiated the property *being President*. A Tensed Properties Presentist can rule out such possibilities, I say, only if she asserts that (1) entails (2): only if she says that the tensed properties that Bush now instantiates must reflect the ordinary properties that Bush once instantiated.

A second option would be to suppose that *having been President* is a complex property that, at least partially, must be accounted for in terms of its relation to the past instantiation of *being President*. *Being a scar* is probably a property like this. To be a scar is a complicated affair, involving not just how things are now, but how things were, as is clear from the fact that a “snapshot” may not capture, for example, the difference between a scar and a congenital birth defect. But of course, if *having been President* is to be understood like that, then appealing to its present instantiation is no way to avoid appeal to past instantiation.¹⁹

The third option I see—the option I find most plausible—is to say that *having been President* stands in for a complex predicate, whose satisfaction requires, not that Bush now instantiate any property at all, but only that he once instantiated the property *being President*. To treat *having been President* this way is to treat it in the way that it is natural to treat *being dead*. To be dead, most of us think, is not to instantiate some property now, but to have instantiated the property *being alive* once but no longer. If tensed properties are understood in this way, then there is no possibility that (1) and (2) will come apart. Indeed, this way of understanding *having been President* is the only one of the three that vindicates the initial sense that (1) and (2) are just two different ways of saying the same

¹⁹add reference to [cameron2010a].

thing. But, of course, the ascription of a tensed property, so understood, isn't really the ascription of a property at all. The property *having been President*, so understood, shouldn't show up in the current snapshot, because the claim that Bush has the property *having been President* turns out, upon analysis, just to be the claim that he once instantiated the property *being President*, not a claim about any property that he now instantiates.

So I think we can safely conclude that Tensed Properties Presentism cannot be used as a way to avoid appeal to past instantiation.

13 Redundancy

We have seen several theories that posit, in addition to or instead of the genuine past, which no longer is, some semblance of the past, which is. We have seen that this semblance of the past cannot do all of the work that the genuine past needs to do. This suggests that there is no compelling reason to posit an existing semblance of the past: to the extent we can make use of it, it will be redundant.

This gives us a reason to prefer presentism over other dynamic theories. But it also gives us a reason to forgo the dominant presentist project, of trying to show how to make do without the past. On the contrary, it suggests that, insofar as we wish to be tenses, we need to find a way to become comfortable pointing beyond reality.

14 References