How to be a Presentist

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1. Introduction: The Standard Definition of Presentism

Presentism is a widely discussed theory of time. But what exactly is the thesis of presentism? Presentism is usually defined in the literature as the thesis that it is always the case that everything is present. Call this the standard definition:

**Presentism- Standard Definition**: Always everything is present

Formally: \( A \ \forall x \text{Present}(x) \)

It is worth making two points about this definition:

(i) First, some hold that presentism is a necessarily true if true (see, for example, Theodore Sider (1999, 2)), while others hold that it is contingently true if true (see, for example, Thomas Crisp (2003, 215). Crisp writes: “The reasons I know of for being a presentist offer no reason at all for thinking presentism is a necessary truth.”). Whether presentism is
necessary or contingent has no bearing on what follows, so I will continue to operate with the modally non-committal standard definition above.

(ii) Second, there is a question about whether the individual quantifier ‘everything’ in the standard definition should be read as restricted or unrestricted. The natural thing to say is that the quantifier is unrestricted (this is Crisp’s (2004, 37) view, for example). However, if the quantifier is unrestricted it follows that if there are abstract things such as numbers and sets and presentism is true, then numbers and sets are present. But some presentists who believe in numbers and sets might wish to deny that abstract things can bear temporal properties such as being present, perhaps because they think that part of what it is to be abstract is to be atemporal in some sense that precludes bearing temporal properties. Such presentists will probably recommend that the quantifier in the standard definition be read as restricted to non-abstract things; otherwise, if there are abstract things then presentism is false, and if abstract things are necessarily abstract (as seems plausible), then if there are abstract things presentism is necessarily false.

The question of whether the quantifier in the standard definition should be read as restricted or unrestricted really depends on what it is for something to be present. For example, suppose that something is present iff it is spatially located (I see no reason to believe this). In that case, the quantifier in the definition should at least be read as restricted to non-abstract things; otherwise, presentism is inconsistent with the existence of abstract things like numbers and sets (which we assume are non-spatial).

The question of what it is for something to be present is the central question to be addressed in what follows. For now, I will follow Crisp’s (2004) advice and assume that the quantifier in the standard definition is unrestricted, and therefore ranges over abstracta if there are such. If we find later that given the best candidate interpretation of the predicate
‘present’, presentism is inconsistent with the existence of abstract things, then we can revise
the standard definition accordingly.

In what follows I describe a very serious problem with the standard definition. The
problem is that there is no obvious way of making interpreting the definition without
construing presentism as either (i) inconsistent with things that most presentists believe, (ii)
consistent with eternalist theories such as the b-theory or the moving spotlight view, or (iii)
inconsistent with the existence of things that the existence of which presentism should not
rule out.¹ This is a problem given the reasonable assumption that any proposed definition of
presentism according to which the thesis has any of these properties is a failure. In other
words, I think that the following are reasonable general constraints on any proposed
definition $D$ of presentism:

(C1) Given $D$, presentism should not have any consequences that most normal self-
described presentists would reject

(C2) Given $D$, presentism must be inconsistent with eternalist theories such as the b-
theory and the moving spotlight view

(C3) Given $D$, presentism must be consistent with the existence of things the
existence of which presentism should not rule out

As for C1: this constraint is a little vague, but the idea is that it would be very
ungenerous to interpret the thesis of presentism in a way that makes most presentists
obviously inconsistent. For example, if most presentists hold that nothing is a former
dinosaur or a future Mars station (where some $x$ is a former [future] $F$ iff $P[F] Fx$), then we
should not define presentism in such a way that presentism entails (perhaps along with other

¹ Note that ‘exist’ and related terms are used in the logician’s sense in what follows, according to which to exist
is just to be something (or be identical to something).
reasonable assumptions) that something is a former dinosaur or a future Mars station.

With regard to C2, it is typically assumed in the literature that presentism and eternalism are inconsistent theories. For example, here is Sider (1999, 2): ‘Presentism is the temporal analogue of the modal doctrine of actualism... The opposite view in the philosophy of modality is possibilism...; its temporal analogue is eternalism...’. Similarly, here is Joshua Mozersky (2011, 122): ‘Presentists are typically opposed by eternalists...’. Moreover, most presentists hold that presentism is inconsistent with eternalism. Thus given C1, we should recognise C2.

Again, C3 is a little vague, but the idea should be obvious: we should not expect the truth of presentism, a thesis in the metaphysics of time, to have serious ontological ramifications for other areas of philosophy. For example, we should not expect presentism to be inconsistent with the existence of non-physical mental events, or abstract objects, or normative properties. (Williamson (Book MS, 27) utilises this constraint.)

As mentioned above, in what follows I argue that there is no way of interpreting the standard definition such that it meets each of C1-C3 above. In particular, I argue that there is no reasonable interpretation $i$ of the predicate ‘present’ such that, given $i$, the standard definition meets each of C1-C3. In light of this argument, I propose a new revised definition of presentism that does meet C1-C3. I recommend that presentists reject the standard definition in favour of this revised definition.

One final point: a distinct (although not always distinguished) debate concerning the standard definition turns on the interpretation of the universal quantifier ‘$\forall x$’. Some argue along the following lines: the universal quantifier in the standard definition must either be read as tensed or untensed. If it is read as tensed, then the standard definition is trivially true; if it is read as tenseless, then the standard definition is clearly false. (See, for example, Ludlow (2004) and Meyer (2005)). I do not engage with this debate in what follows, partly
because I do not fully understand it, but mostly due to lack of space. In any case, my objection to the standard definition is independent of this debate.

2. The Problem with the Standard Definition

Consider once again the standard definition of presentism:

**Presentism- Standard Definition**: Always everything is present

*Formally*: $\forall x \text{Present}(x)$

The question is: what exactly does it mean to say that something is ‘present’? In this section I describe a number of different apparently plausible interpretations of the predicate ‘present’. In each case I show that given the relevant interpretation, the standard definition fails to meet one or more of C1-C3, and thus fails as a definition of presentism.

Here is one suggestion:

**Presentness 1**: It is always the case that for all $x$, $x$ is present iff $x$ instantiates a fundamental property of presentness

Given presentness 1, the standard definition comes to:

**Presentism 1**: Always everything instantiates a fundamental property of presentness

The problem with this suggestion is that presentism 1 fails to meet constraint C1. That is, given presentism 1, presentism has a consequence that most normal self-described presentists would reject: namely, that always, everything instantiates a fundamental property of presentness. For example, here is Dean Zimmerman (1996, n.8), a leading presentist: ‘...no real presentist has any reason to believe in a special quality of ‘being present’ (and, indeed,
no articulate presentist that I know of has ever posited such a quality)...’. Zimmerman goes on to characterise ‘real presentism’ as a thesis that ‘has no room for a special quality of ‘being present’’. I believe that most ‘articulate’ presentists would agree with Zimmerman here. Thus presentism 1 cannot be the correct interpretation of the standard definition.

Here is another suggestion:

**Presentness 2**: It is always the case that for all $x$, $x$ is present iff $x$ is something

**Formally**: $A \forall x (\text{Present}(x) \leftrightarrow \exists y y=x)$

Given presentness 2, the standard definition comes to:

**Presentism 2**: Always everything is something

**Formally**: $A \forall x \exists y y=x$

This interpretation is supported by the following quote from Zimmerman (1996, my emphasis): ‘There is no advantage for the presentist in distinguishing between being present and existing; and no other obvious candidate to play the role of ‘being present’ comes readily to mind. Thus to be present just is to be real or to exist...’ The problem with this suggestion is that presentism 2 fails to meet constraint C2. That is, given presentism 2, presentism is consistent with eternalist theories such as the b-theory and the moving spotlight view. The reason is obvious: presentism 2 is a trivial truth, and is therefore accepted by all sensible theorists of time, including eternalists. It follows that presentism 2 cannot be the correct interpretation of the standard definition.

Here is another suggestion:

**Presentness 3**: It is always the case that for all $x$, $x$ is present iff it is now the case that $x$ is something
Formally: \( A \forall x (Present(x) \leftrightarrow N \exists y \equiv x) \)

Given presentness 3, the standard definition comes to:

**Presentism 3**: Always everything is now something

Formally: \( A \forall x N \exists y \equiv x \)

The problem with this suggestion is that presentism 3 fails to meet constraint C1. That is, given presentism 3, presentism has consequences that most normal self-described presentists would reject. For example, if always everything is now something, then it is now the case that something is a former dinosaur (it is left open whether this former dinosaur is now a dinosaur or a merely former dinosaur). Thus if presentism is presentism 3, then presentism entails (along with the reasonable premise that something was a dinosaur) that something is a former dinosaur. However, I think it is safe to say that most presentists hold that there are no former dinosaurs (change the example if you disagree!). Thus presentism 3 cannot be the correct interpretation of the standard definition.

Of course, a defender of presentness 3 might reply to the above as follows: whilst it is true for the reason described above that presentism 3 cannot be the correct interpretation of the standard definition, it does not follow that presentness 3 is the wrong analysis of presentness. The reason is that when presentists who accept presentism 3 say that always everything is present, what they really mean is that the sentence ‘Everything is present’ is true in every context of utterance (or in other words, is a Kaplanian logical truth). Thus given presentness 3, the correct interpretation of the standard definition is:

**Presentism 3.5**: The sentence ‘Everything is now something’ (formally: ‘\( \forall x N \exists y \equiv y \equiv x \)’) expresses a true proposition in every context of utterance, or in other words is a Kaplanian logical truth
The problem with the above suggestion is that presentism 3.5 fails to meet constraint C2. That is, given presentism 3.5, presentism is consistent with eternalist theories such as the b-theory and the moving spotlight view. For example, consider the b-theory. Standard b-theorists such as Sider (2001) interpret the standard temporal operators as quantifiers over times, just as standard modal realists such as Lewis (1986) interpret the standard modal operators ‘◊’ and ‘□’ as quantifiers over possible worlds. Furthermore, standard b-theorists hold that in most ordinary contexts, temporal operators tacitly restrict the individual quantifiers in their scope to the occupants of the relevant time. Thus, for example, in ordinary contexts an utterance at time \( t_U \) of the simple past-tense sentence

(1) ‘Something was a dinosaur’

is counted as true iff there is a time \( t \) earlier than \( t_U \) such that there is a dinosaur at \( t \).

Now consider the central b-theoretic thesis is that there are things that do not exist at the same time. Given that what is the case is sometimes the case, the sentence ‘There are things that do not exist at the same time’ entails the sentence

(2) ‘S (There are things that do not exist at the same time)’

But if the tacit quantifier over times ‘S’ is interpreted in the normal way as restricting the individual quantifiers in its scope to inhabitants of the time in question, then (2) is true iff there is a time \( t \) such that there are things that exist at \( t \) that do not exist at the same time. Thus in order to preserve the basic temporal-logical principle that what is the case is sometimes the case, standard b-theorists must interpret the quantifier in (2) as unrestricted. It follows that there are contexts in which the standard temporal operators must be interpreted as failing to restrict the quantifiers in their scope to occupants of the time in question. More generally, it seems that standard b-theorists must admit that the temporal operators are redundant when the quantifiers within their scope are unrestricted. Given that both of the
quantifiers in the sentence ‘Everything is now something’ are intended to be read as unrestricted, it follows that standard b-theorists should treat this sentence as expressing relative to any context the trivially true proposition that everything is something. Thus standard b-theorists should accept that the sentence ‘Everything is now something’ is a Kaplanian logical truth. It follows that if presentism 3.5 is the correct interpretation of the standard definition, then presentism is consistent with the b-theory.

Here is another suggestion, due to Mozersky (2011, 122-5). According to Mozersky, presentism is the thesis that ‘that and only that which exists₁, exists₂’, where (as Mozersky explains) ‘exists₁’ is a tensed verb that entails ‘exists now’, and ‘exists₂’ is similar in meaning to the existential quantifier of first-order predicate logic, in the sense that it is ‘neutral with respect to temporal context of utterance’. Now, although he does not say so explicitly, we can assume that Mozersky thinks that presentism is always true if true. Therefore, given what Mozersky says about the intended meanings of the terms ‘exist₁’ and ‘exist₂’, the thesis that that and only that which exists₁, exists₂ is equivalent to the following thesis:

**Presentism 4**: Always everything is such it is now something iff it is something

**Formally**: \( \forall x ((\exists_1 y = x) \leftrightarrow \exists_2 y = x) \)

The problem with Mozersky’s suggestion should be obvious: presentism 4 fails to meet constraints C1 and C2. First, presentism 4 entails that always everything is such that if it is something, then it is something now. Given that it will be the case that something is a great-great-grandchild of Elizabeth II, it follows that it is now the case that something is a future great-great-grandchild of Elizabeth II. Thus if presentism is presentism 4 then presentism entails (along with some reasonable premises) that something is a future great-great-grandchild of Elizabeth II. However, I think it is safe to say that most presentists hold that there are no future great-great-grandchildren of Elizabeth II (change the example if you
disagree).

Second, we have seen that standard b-theorists should treat the temporal operators as redundant when the quantifiers within their scope are unrestricted. Thus standard b-theorists should treat the temporal operators in presentism 4 as redundant, given that the quantifiers within their scope are intended to be read as unrestricted. Thus for b-theorists, presentism 4 amounts to the trivial truth that everything is something iff it is something. It follows that if presentism is presentism 4, then presentism is consistent with the b-theory.

Here is another suggestion, due to Crisp (2003, 212-15). According to Crisp ‘an object \( x \) is present iff \( x \) occupies or exists at the present time.’ But what is ‘the present time’, and what is it for something to ‘occupy’ the present time? Crisp (2003, 212) explains as follows:

We shall think of the present time as follows. Say that an object \( x \) is slim iff, for any \( y \) and \( z \), if \( y \) and \( z \) are parts of \( x \), then there is either no temporal distance or a temporal distance of zero between \( y \) and \( z \).

A time...is a maximal slim object: an object such that the mereological sum of it and anything which isn’t a part of it is not slim. The present time...is the maximal slim object that includes as a part every event that occurs now.

Thirdly, say that something exists at or occupies the present time iff it is a part of the present time.

Putting all of the above together yields the following interpretation of the predicate ‘present’:

**Presentness 4:** It is always the case that for all \( x \), \( x \) is present iff \( x \) is part of a maximal slim object that includes as a part every event that is occurring now

**Formally:** \( \forall x \ (\text{Present}(x) \leftrightarrow \exists y \ (\text{Maximally slim}(y) \& \forall z ((\text{Event}(z) \& \text{N Occurring}(z)) \rightarrow \text{Part}(z, y) \& \text{Part}(x, y)))) \)

Given presentness 4, the standard definition comes to:
**Presentism 5**: Always everything is part of a maximal slim object that includes as a part every event that is occurring now

**Formally**: \( \forall x (\exists y (\text{Maximally slim}(y) \& \forall z ((\text{Event}(z) \& \text{N Occurring}(z)) \rightarrow Part(z, y)) \& Part(x, y))) \)

The problem with Crisp’s suggestion is that presentism 5 fails to meet constraint C1. That is, given presentism 5, presentism has consequences that most normal self-described presentists would reject. The reason is as follows: if it is always the case that everything is part a maximal slim object that includes as a part every event that is occurring now, then (for example) it was the case that Socrates is part of a maximal slim object that includes as a part every event that is occurring now. Consider an event that is occurring now, such as the event of your reading this sentence. Given that the event of your reading this sentence is occurring now, it follows from presentism 5 that it was the case that Socrates is part a maximal slim object that includes as a part the event of your reading this sentence. Given Crisp’s account of what it is for an object to be maximally slim and for some \( x \) to occupy some \( y \) (quoted above), it follows that it was the case that there is no temporal distance or a temporal distance of zero between Socrates and the event of your reading this sentence. However, I take it that most presentists would deny that Socrates and the event of your reading this sentence were ever at temporal distance zero.

Of course, some presentists (e.g. Zimmerman (1997)) argue that certain kinds of events are always something (or as we shall put it from now on, that certain kinds of events are *permanents*). Such presentists might want to allow that the event of your reading this sentence is among the permanent events, and therefore that it was the case that Socrates and the event of your reading this sentence were at temporal distance zero. However, there is a good reason why presentists who allow that certain kinds of events are permanents should
deny that the event of your reading this sentence is a permanent. The reason is that the following principle seems plausible: always, if something is the event of your reading this sentence, then you are something. (After all, if it is ever the case that you are reading this sentence, then surely you are doing something then- namely reading this sentence- and if you are ever doing something, then surely you are something then.) It follows from this plausible principle and the claim that the event of your reading this sentence is a permanent that you are a permanent. However, most presentists who hold that certain kinds of events are permanents would deny that you are a permanent. Therefore most such presentists should deny that the event of your reading this sentence is a permanent.

It remains that most presentists would (or should) deny that Socrates and the event of your reading this sentence were ever at temporal distance zero. Given that presentism 5 entails that it was the case that Socrates and the event of your reading this sentence are at temporal distance zero, presentism 5 fails to meet constraint C1. It follows that presentism 5 cannot be the correct interpretation of the standard definition of presentism.

Finally, here is a pair of suggested interpretations of the predicate ‘present’ due to Williamson (Book MS, 27-8):

(i) First, it may that something is present iff it has a spatial location:

**Presentness 5:** It is always the case that for all \( x \), \( x \) is present iff \( x \) has a spatial location

**Formally:** \( A \ \forall x (Present(x) \leftrightarrow Spatial\ Location(x)) \)

Given presentness 5, the standard definition comes to:

**Presentism 6:** Always everything has a spatial location

**Formally:** \( A \ \forall x (Spatial\ Location(x)) \)
The problem with this suggestion, as Williamson points out (although not in exactly these terms), is that presentism 6 fails to meet constraint C3. That is, given presentism 6, presentism is inconsistent with the existence of things the existence of which presentism should not rule out. In particular, if presentism is presentism 6 and abstract objects such as numbers and sets have no spatial location, then if presentism is true there are never any abstract objects. It follows that presentism 6 cannot be the correct interpretation of the standard definition.

(ii) Second, it may be that if something has a temporal location then it is present iff it is spatially located:

   **Presentness 6**: It is always the case that for all \( x \), if \( x \) has a temporal location, then \( x \) is present iff \( x \) has a spatial location

   **Formally**: \( \forall x (Temporal\ location(x) \rightarrow (Present(x) \leftrightarrow Spatial\ location(x))) \)

Given presentness 6, the standard definition comes to:

   **Presentism 7**: Always everything with a temporal location is spatially located

   **Formally**: \( \forall x (Temporal\ location(x) \rightarrow Spatial\ location(x)) \)

The problem with this suggestion, as Williamson points out (although not in exactly these terms), is that presentism 7 also fails to meet constraint C3. That is, given presentism 7, presentism is inconsistent with the existence of things the existence of which presentism should not rule out. In particular, if presentism is presentism 7 and mental events are non-physical events (and as such lack a spatial location) that occur in time (and as such have a temporal location), then if presentism is true there are never mental events. It follows that presentism 7 cannot be the correct interpretation of the standard definition.
3. A New Definition of Presentism

We have described a number of different apparently plausible interpretations of the standard definition, with a particular focus on the interpretation of the predicate ‘present’. In each case we have seen that given the relevant interpretation, the standard definition fails to meet one or more of C1-C3, and thus fails as a definition of presentism. Of course, there may be other ways of interpreting the standard definition. However, our discussion suggests very strongly that there is no plausible interpretation of the standard definition such that it meets each of C1-C3. If this correct, then the standard definition of presentism is failure. Let us assume that it is correct. What should presentists do? I recommend that presentists abandon the standard definition in favour of a new definition that meets each of C1-C3. In this section, I describe just such a definition. I do not defend presentism so defined; in fact, I agree with b-theorists like Sider (2001) and a-theorists like Tooley (1997) and Sullivan (forthcoming) that presentism is false. However, I do hold that presentism is an interesting theory of time that is worthy of serious consideration.

I believe that the best way to characterise theories of time such as presentism is in relation to the ‘a-theoretic’ notion of change over time, according to which there is change over time iff there are propositions that change in truth-value simpliciter over time. (I assume that there is change over time in the a-theoretic sense iff the a-theory is true; see Dorr (Book MS, Chapter 1) for an argument to this effect.) Given this notion of change over time, theories of time can be characterised in relation to how they answer the following two questions:

(Q1) What sort of change in what there is (i.e. ontological change) occurs over time?

Do things begin to be only, cease to be only, both begin and cease to be, or neither?
(Q2) What sort of change in *how things are* (i.e. qualitative change) occurs over time? Is there no change, just a little, or a great deal? Moreover, if there is change in how things are, are monadic properties gained but never lost, lost but never gained, or both gained and lost?

According to eternalist theories such as the b-theory (defended by Sider (2001)) and the moving spotlight view (described but not endorsed by Broad (1923)), the correct answer to (Q1) is that there is no change in what there is over time, and thus nothing ever begins or ceases to be over time. It follows that eternalists accept the thesis of *permanentism*:²

**Permanentism:** Always everything is always something

Formally: $\forall x A \ \forall y y=x$

(Do b-theorists really accept permanentism? Yes: as we saw above in §2, b-theorists must admit that the temporal operators are redundant when the quantifiers within their scope are unrestricted. Given that both of the quantifiers in the sentence ‘$\forall x A \ \forall y y=x$’ are intended to be read as unrestricted, b-theorists should treat the sentence as expressing the trivially true proposition that everything is something. Thus standard b-theorists should accept permanentism.³)

Eternalists are permanentists. However, eternalists disagree about the answer to (Q2). According to b-theorists, the answer to (Q2) is that *no* change in how things are occurs over time. On the other hand, according to moving spotlighters the answer to (Q2) is that *very little* change in how things are occurs over time: the only qualitative change that occurs over time is in which time bears the fundamental monadic property of presentness.

We have seen how eternalists such as b-theorists and moving spotlighters answer

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² The name ‘permanentism’ for the thesis that always, everything is always something is due to Williamson (Book MS, 4).
³ This argument is due to Williamson (Book MS, 19-21).
(Q1), and the different ways in which they answer (Q2). Growing blockers answer (Q1) differently. According to defenders of the growing block view (such as Broad (1923), Tooley (1997) and Forrest (2004)) the answer to (Q1) is that the only sort of change in what there is that occurs over time is that things begin to be. Let us call the thesis that nothing ever ceases to be but sometimes something begins to be the thesis of pastism:

**Pastism:** Nothing ever ceases to be but sometimes something begins to be

**Formally:** \( A \left( \neg \exists x F \rightarrow \exists y y=x \right) \& S \left( \exists x P \rightarrow \exists y y=x \right) \)

Growing blockers are pastists. However, growing blockers disagree about the answer to (Q2). According to ‘classic’ growing blockers such as Tooley (1997), the answer to (Q2) is that there is change over time in how things are but very few monadic properties are lost as time passes. On the other hand, according to ‘ghostly’ growing blockers such as Forrest (2004), the answer to (Q2) is that there is change over time in how things are but very many monadic properties are lost as time passes.

We have seen how different theories of time can be characterised according to how they answer (Q1) and (Q2) above. The question is: how do presentists answer these questions? According to standard presentists the answer to (Q1) is that many things-in particular, many ordinary objects such as cats, cars, trees and stars-begin and cease to be over time. Call the thesis that things both begin and cease to be over time currentism:

**Currentism:** Sometimes something begins to be and sometimes something ceases to be

**Formally:** \( S \left( \exists x P \rightarrow \exists y y=x \right) \& S \left( \exists x F \rightarrow \exists y y=x \right) \)

Presentists are currentists. Moreover, as far as I am aware all presentists agree that the answer to (Q2) is that a great deal of change in how things are occurs over time, and that very many
monadic properties are gained and lost as time passes.

In light of the failure of the standard definition described in §2, I submit that presentists should define their thesis as a ‘common sense’ version of currentism; that is, a version according to which many things—in particular, many ordinary objects such as cats, cars, trees and stars—begin and cease to be over time:

**Presentism- Revised Definition:** Many things—in particular many ordinary objects—begin and cease to be over time

The advantages to presentists of adopting the revised definition are obvious:

(i) First, so characterised presentism does not have any consequences that most normal self-described presentists would reject. As far as I am aware, no self-described presentist has ever denied that many things, and in particular many ordinary objects, begin and cease to be over time.

(ii) Second, so characterised presentism is clearly inconsistent with eternalist theories such as the b-theory and the moving spotlight view (as well as the various growing block views). This is a very important advantage of our suggested characterisation, as the denial of eternalism seems central to the presentist viewpoint.

(iii) Third, so characterised presentism is clearly consistent with the existence of things the existence of which presentism should not rule out, such as abstract objects and non-physical mental events.

(iv) Fourth, some presentists hold that times are permanents (e.g. Crisp (2007), Markosian (2004)), and others hold that certain kinds of events are permanents (Zimmerman (1997)), and that space-time points never cease to be (Zimmerman (2011)). Notice that given our
suggested definition, presentism is perfectly consistent with these sorts of theses. Indeed, one of the great virtues of our suggested definition is that it is consistent with a wide range of more specific temporal-ontological theses concerning what is permanent and what is temporary.

(v) Finally, so characterised presentism is a straightforward and relatively clear thesis. Certainly, our suggested characterisation is clearer than the standard definition.

4. Conclusion

We have seen that it is very difficult to provide a satisfactory interpretation of the standard definition of presentism. In light of this, we have recommended that presentists abandon the standard definition in favour of a new definition, according to which presentism is a ‘common sense’ version of currentism, the temporal-ontological thesis that things both begin and cease to be over time. We have seen that, unlike the standard definition, this revised definition meets the criteria for a successful definition of presentism. Thus there is no reason why presentist should not adopt the revised definition.

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4 Or even that people are permanents, which is a view that one might hold if one identified people with permanent souls.
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