

The Presentism/Eternalism Debate

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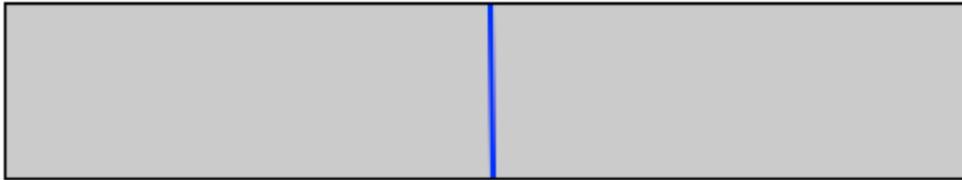
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Metaphysics of time



The 4-D Block Universe
(Eternalism)



The Moving Spotlight
Model



The Growing Block
Model



Presentism

The traditional view

- Traditional theories of time are defined by how they answer two questions:
- **Ontological Question:** Are the past and future real?
- **Qualitative Question:** Is there something 'metaphysically special' about the present time?

Presentism and eternalism

- **Ontological Question:** Are the past and future real?
- **Eternalism:** The past and future are real
- **Presentism:** Only the present is real
- **Growing Block Theory:** The past is real and the future is not

A-theory and B-theory

- **Qualitative Question:** Is there something metaphysically special about the present time in virtue of which it is present?
- (God's favourite time)
- **A-theory:** There is something metaphysically special about the present moment
- **B-theory:** All times are metaphysically on a par

- **Other common A-theory commitments**
- There is some metaphysically fundamental distinction between the present and other times (relative naturalness)
- The temporal operators (**P**, **F**) are metaphysically fundamental
- “All varieties [of the doctrine that time passes] agree that the tense operators are metaphysically basic” Sider 2011, 257
- ‘Change is real’, ‘time flows’

Whatever about the A-/B-theory debate, the presentism/eternalism debate is not in good standing

Necessitism and contingentism

- In *Modal Logic as Metaphysics* (2014) Williamson defends *necessitism*
- **Necessitism:** (Necessarily) everything there is exists of necessity
- Nothing that actually exists (e.g. my phone) could have failed to exist
- Anything that could have existed (e.g. my possible phone) actually exists

Marwig

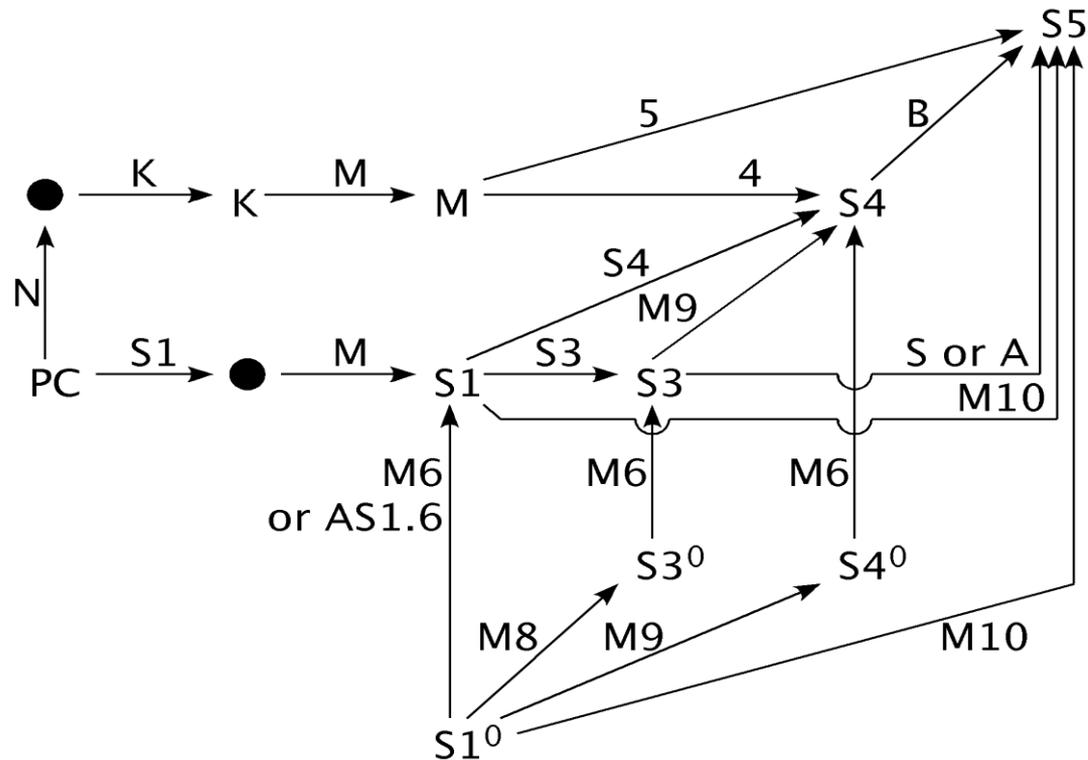


- **Contingentism:** (Possibly) there are things that could have failed to exist
- Contingentists hold that lots of actual things could have failed to exist
- And lots of merely possible things don't actually exist (e.g. Marwig)
- Contingentism *might be* the common sense view

- Why would anyone accept necessitism?
- **A very simple argument**
 - (1) $\text{Dan}=\text{Dan}$ (Reflexivity of Identity)
 - (2) $\exists y y=\text{Dan}$ (Existential Generalisation)
 - (3) $\Box \exists y y=\text{Dan}$ (Necessitation)
- In short: standard modal logic implies necessitism
- Contingentists must reject RI, EG, or N
- But doing so has costs

- Standard second-order modal logic: modal logic with quantification into predicate position
- ‘There is a way that Dan could be’ ($\exists F \Diamond Fa$)
- **Haecceities**: (Necessarily) everything has an essence that exists of necessity
- Contingentists must reject haecceities
- But doing so complicates standard second-order modal logic

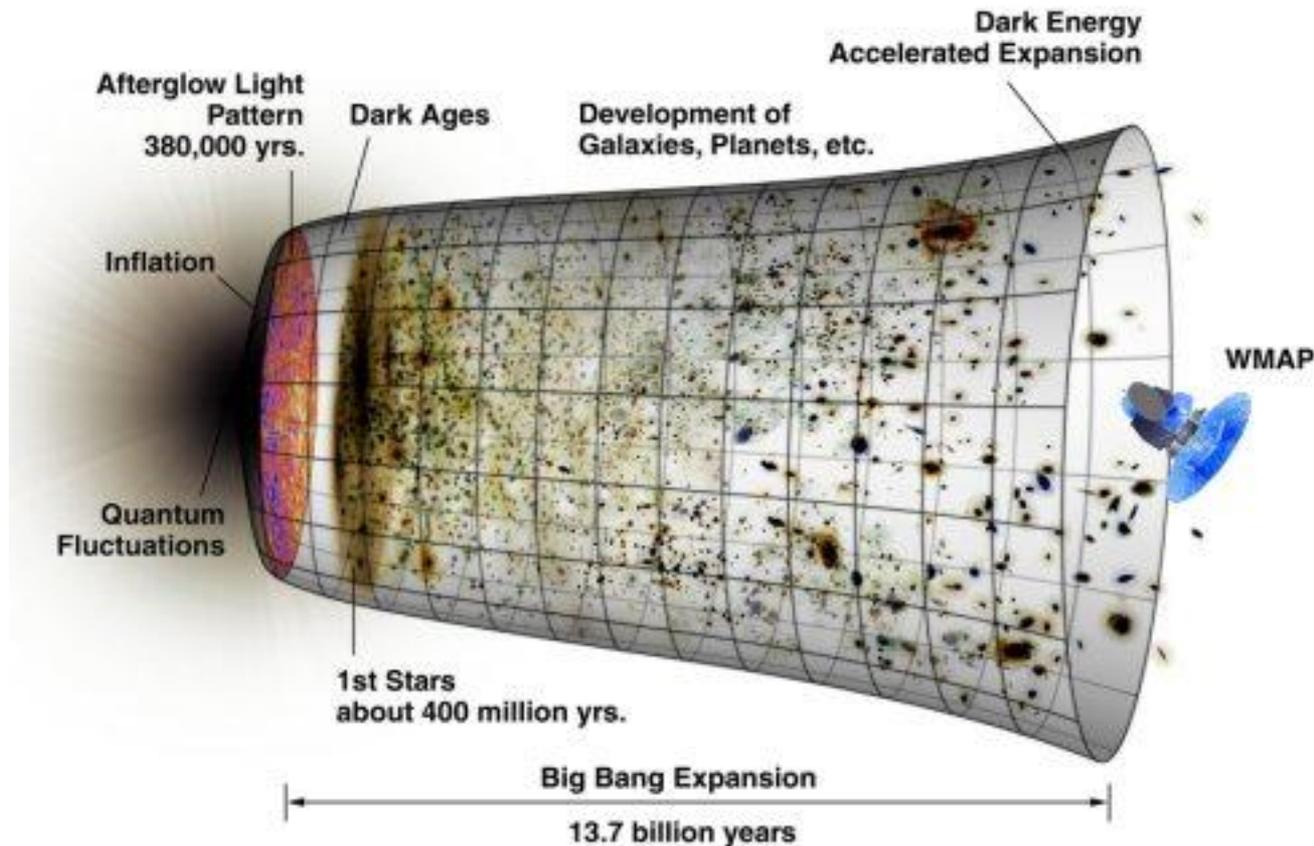
- In short:** If you have certain ‘realist’ views about logic, modality, and the relation between the two, you have good reasons to accept necessitism



Permanentism and temporaryism

- The temporal analogue of necessitism
- **Permanentism:** (Always) everything there is exists forever
- Everything that exists right now (e.g. my phone) existed at the beginning of time
- Everything that will exist in twenty years (the iphone 10) exists right now

- The simplest temporal logic implies permanentism
- But: permanentists don't need to rely on an argument from logic



- The 'spacetime theory' is plausibly a permanentist theory
- Everything that ever exists has a location in spacetime
- Spacetime never changes
- So everything that ever exists is always 'out there' somewhere in spacetime
- Xanthippe and President Jones
- (Space and '(everywhere) everything exists everywhere')

A new question

- ‘Permanentism and temporaryism might remind some readers of views associated with the terms ‘eternalism’ and ‘presentism’ respectively. However, the use of the latter two words... is unclear. There is a widespread feeling of dissatisfaction with the eternalism-presentism distinction.’ *MLAM* 24

- **Presentism:** (always) everything is present
- **Eternalism:** (always) there are past and future things
- What is it for something to be ‘present’ in the sense of presentism?
- Not an easy question to answer!
- Consider: is Xanthippe’s continued existence consistent with presentism?
- (It is if she’s present! But can we do better?)

- **Williamson's proposal:** We should focus on the clearer permanentism/temporaryism debate
- **My proposal:** We should identify presentism with temporaryism and eternalism with permanentism

- Ross Cameron (MS), 'On Characterising the Presentism/Eternalism and Actualism/Possibilism Debates'
- 'Deasy rejects the traditional characterization of the presentism/non-presentism debate not (a la Williamson on modality) on the grounds that his preferred tense logic renders 'Everything is present' trivial. Rather, he considers a bunch of attempts to understand what 'is present' means in that statement, and finds them all wanting.'

- ‘But he doesn’t consider anything like the definition I offer above: that ‘is present’ means ‘is located at the present time’. He does consider some definitions of ‘is present’ that invoke location, but to my mind they miss the mark... what’s important to presentism isn’t just things having spatial location, but *where it is they are located - in the present!*’

- **Cameronian presentism:** (Always) everything that is located at all is located in, and only in, the present
- **Cameronian eternalism:** (Always) some things are located in the past, some thing are located in the present, and some things are located in the future

Permanentism

Eternalism

Temporaryism

Presentism

Permanentism
Eternalism

?

Temporaryism
Presentism



New Problems

- Question: Are we talking about a fundamental location relation or not?
- If we are, B-theorists who are spacetime monists are not eternalists
- **Spacetime Monism**: ‘Spacetime is substance enough. There is no need for the dualism of the contained and the container (or for fundamental containment relations). When God makes the world, she need only create spacetime.’ (Schaffer 2012)

- Spacetime monism implies that there are no fundamental location relations
- ‘There is no need...for fundamental containment relations’ (Schaffer)
- In that case, monist B-theorists are not Cameronian eternalists
- But they do hold that ‘all past and future things exist’!

- Suppose the location relation can be non-fundamental
- Some presentists identify times with instant-propositions
- **Instant-propositions:** a proposition p is an instant-proposition $\text{=: } p$ is a complete, consistent propositions that is sometimes true
- Informally: complete, consistent stories about how the world is, was and will be

- Presentism with instant-propositions suggests a very natural analysis of ‘located at a time’ claims
- **Location-at-a-time:** x is located at past/future time $t =: t$ implies that x exists
- For example: the proposition identical with t in 398BC implies that Xanthippe exists

- Given the analysis, presentism with instant-propositions implies that there are things located at past and future times
- Assuming the location relation can be non-fundamental, it follows that this view is a Cameronian eternalist view
- But presentism with instant-propositions is presentism!
- (On what grounds?)

- Suppose Xanthippe exists and had, but no longer has, a location
- Is Xanthippe present or past?
- Cameronian presentism: Xanthippe is present
- BUT: x is past iff x had, but no longer has, a location
- Not clear to me...

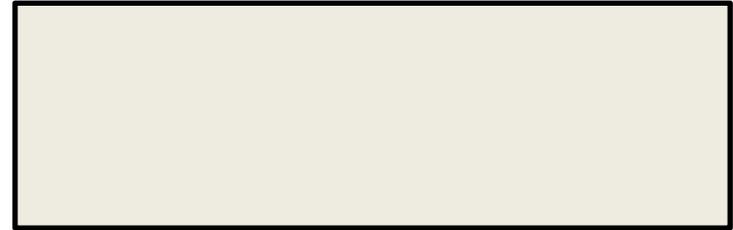
The Riches of Permanentism

- (1) Existence is eternal (**permanentism**)
- (2) There is something metaphysically special about the present moment in virtue of which it is present (**A-theory**)

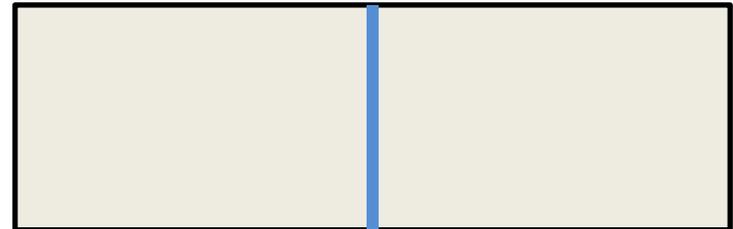
- **Question:** How many fundamental properties are temporary?
- Temporary properties are gained and lost over time (e.g. being happy)
- Permanent properties are never gained or lost (e.g. being happy at this instant)

- **Moving Spotlight Theories**

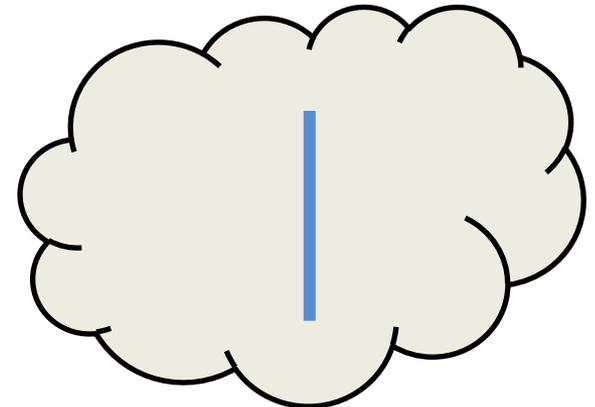
(1) None (Dorr, Bacon):



(2) One (Deasy):



(3) Many (Williamson, Sullivan):



Thank you