



## The Existence of the Past

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## THE EXISTENCE OF THE PAST

Joseph Diekemper

### Abstract

My goal in this paper is to address what I call the ‘Incoherence’ objection to the growing universe theory of time. At the root of the objection is the thought that one cannot wed objective temporal becoming with the existence of a tenseless past—which is apparently what the growing universe theorist tries to do. To do so, however, is to attribute both dynamic and static aspects to time, and, given the mutual exclusivity of these two aspects—so the thought goes—incoherence results. My solution to the problem is to offer an alternative account of past existence that is compatible with a dynamic conception of time. I take as my starting point Adams’ suggestion that the past exists in virtue of the existence of thisnesses of past individuals. I first seek to defend this suggestion, before amending it in order to provide a satisfactory response to the Incoherence objection. The result is a new growing universe theory which avoids the Incoherence objection but which has some surprising features of its own. Chief among these is the rejection of present events. I argue, however, that such a rejection is a necessary consequence of endorsing the growing universe theory, and that it is not as counter-intuitive as it initially sounds.

### *Introduction*

In the debate between A-Theorists and B-Theorists in the philosophy of time, it is often argued (and sometimes taken for granted) that the only viable alternative to the static, eternalist B-Theory is the version of the A-Theory known as presentism. Presentism is the view, roughly, that the only things that exist (*simpliciter*) are present things. Thus, the presentist believes that past and future things are equally non-existent (just as the B-Theorist believes that past and future things are equally existent). I have argued elsewhere that the presentist, given this doctrine of ontological symmetry, must reconcile her theory with the intuition that the past is fixed and the future is not, *and* that she is unable to do so. For the A-Theorist, there must be

some feature of time that can account for a robust asymmetry of fixity—not to mention the other temporal asymmetries—and the presentist is unable to provide us with one. Only an ontological asymmetry can play this role, given an A-Theoretic framework.<sup>1</sup>

On the basis of these concerns, I concluded in the earlier article that presentism fails. I also suggested a feature of time that *can* account for the asymmetries; namely, temporal becoming, where that notion is conceived in the following way: events *become* real in the present and remain real thereafter. This conception of temporal becoming, I suggested, provides us with the immediate ground for the asymmetry of fixity: the past is different from the future because the past exists and the future does not. So, *contra* the presentist, the difference between past and future *is* an ontological one, and this difference, based as it is on a non-presentist conception of temporal becoming, fundamentally constitutes temporal asymmetry. I will take these prior conclusions as my starting assumptions here, and I will call their conjunction the growing universe theory of time.<sup>2</sup> Why is it often thought that the growing universe theory is *not* a viable alternative to presentism? It is because of a powerful objection to the theory which I call the ‘Incoherence’ objection. It is my purpose in this paper is to consider this objection, and to formulate a version of the growing universe theory that successfully avoids it.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See Diekemper (2005).

<sup>2</sup> I prefer this label to the more standard ‘growing block’ label, since the latter implies a four dimensionalist theory of time and persistence, and I wish to avoid this implication.

<sup>3</sup> Given that I am interested in defending a version of the A-Theory of time against a rival A-Theory, I will not be considering B-Theoretic objections. For my purposes here, I take the A-Theory of time to denote a dynamic conception of time according to which temporal becoming (however conceived) and tense are objective features of reality. I take the B-Theory to denote a static conception of time according to which there is no objective temporal becoming, and according to which past, present, and future events all exist tenselessly. In stipulating

## 1. *The Incoherence objection*

### 1.1

At the root of the Incoherence objection is the thought that one cannot wed objective temporal becoming with the existence of a tenseless past—which is apparently what the growing universe theorist does. To do so is to attribute both dynamic and static aspects to time, and, given the mutual exclusivity of these two aspects—so the thought goes— incoherence results. Merricks (2006), for example, articulates the Incoherence objection by having us consider Nero sitting in the past watching a gladiator bout, and thinking to himself, ‘I am sitting here at the present time’. Now, given that the event of Nero’s thought is fixed in the past, it can never change. This seems to imply that Nero is now and forevermore thinking false thoughts (because he’s not presently sitting there). Of course, the thought is not false when he actually thinks it—that is, when he thinks it in, say, AD 60, it’s not false. But if the event of Nero thinking, ‘I am sitting here at the present time,’ *still* exists (as the growing universe theorist apparently says it does), then Nero *is* still thinking the thought. He is thinking it at AD 60, and when AD 60 was present, it was true; but since AD 60 is no longer present, Nero’s thoughts have changed in truth value, even though there is not supposed to have been any intrinsic change in the event of which his thought is a constituent (in virtue of the fixity of the past).

Now the growing universe theorist may wish to avoid this objection by claiming that the change in the truth value of a past belief does *not* constitute an intrinsic change in the event of which the belief is a constituent. Unfortunately, however, the objection goes deeper than this response acknowledges. The point of the Incoherence objection is that the *truthmaker* for Nero’s belief, i.e. Nero’s *presently* sitting, is *no longer* present. So apparently

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these definitions, I am drawing the distinction between the A- and B-Theories rather coarsely, but my argument does not require a more fine grained distinction.

the growing universe theorist must claim that Nero is presently believing his belief, even though his presently sitting is not present; and of course this is incoherent, unless we deny that Nero is *presently* believing ‘I am sitting here at the present time,’ (perhaps he is pastly believing it). This, however, *would* amount to an intrinsic change in the event. In order for Nero’s belief, ‘I am sitting here at the present time,’ to be true (according to the A-Theorist), presentness must be a constituent of the event of Nero’s believing it; but if the event is past, presentness cannot be a constituent of it. So the worry is that, on the growing universe theory, past events are intrinsically present.

The B-theorist avoids this worry because, for her, the ‘present’ does not pick out any objective feature of reality, it merely functions as an indexical (like ‘here’ or ‘I’). The presentist avoids the worry because, although ‘the present’ is an objective feature of reality, all that reality is composed of is present objects and events (that is, Nero is not presently watching a gladiator bout in AD 60, thinking ‘I am sitting here at the present time’). The growing universe theorist, however, acknowledges the objectivity of the present (because hers is a dynamic theory), but claims that events continue to exist after they have occurred in the present.

I will have more to say about the nature and source of the Incoherence objection in Section 2.1; but I do want to make two further points explicit here. First, I take it that Merricks’ objection concerns a metaphysical problem with the growing universe theory, not an epistemological one; and I, too, will be concerned with the metaphysical problem. Secondly, given the assumptions which I stated in the Introduction, I will not be considering Fine’s (2006) solution to what is, no doubt, a related problem. Fine identifies four theses concerning the configuration of temporal reality, which he traces ‘loosely’ back to McTaggart’s (1908) argument for the unreality of time. They are Realism (i.e. tense is real); Neutrality (i.e. no time is ontologically privileged); Absolutism (i.e. reality is not relative to a

time); and Coherence (i.e. reality is not contradictory) (Fine, 2006: 400). Given that these four theses cannot all be true, one of them must be jettisoned: the eternalist rejects Realism and the presentist rejects Neutrality, but given certain problems with presentism which Fine identifies, he argues that the tensed realist would be better off rejecting either Absolutism or Coherence, rather than Neutrality. What I want to be explicit about here is that just as the presentist cannot retain Neutrality, nor can the growing universe theorist. Neutrality cannot allow for a non-existent future, since it cannot allow that non-future times are ontologically privileged, which they clearly are if non-future times exist and future ones do not. Given this, there is little motivation to consider what Fine acknowledges are the ‘nonstandard’ rejections of either Absolutism or Coherence.<sup>4</sup> Nonetheless, since the growing universe theory is a hybrid theory (hybrid, that is, between presentism and eternalism), merely giving up Neutrality will not suffice to preserve Coherence, and this means that the onus is upon the proponent of such a theory to offer an account of past existence which neither contradicts nor compromises her dynamic conception of temporal reality.<sup>5</sup> Fortunately, however, the growing universe theorist can provide such an account.

### *1.2 The makings of a response*

I take my cue here from Robert Adams’ (1986) suggestion about the existence of the thisnesses of past individuals, where a thisness of an individual  $x$  is the property of being  $x$ , or the property of being identical to  $x$ . What Adams has in mind here is primitive, non-qualitative thisness; that is to say, an individual  $x$ ’s thisness is *not* merely a conjunction of all of  $x$ ’s qualitative properties. What is a qualitative property? According to Adams,

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<sup>4</sup> As a matter of fact, as we will see in Section 2.1, Adams’ rejection of *both* Neutrality and Absolutism *yields* incoherence.

<sup>5</sup> So although the Incoherence objection may be related to McTaggart’s paradox, more work is required in solving it than just giving up one of Fine’s four inconsistent theses.

a property is purely qualitative—a suchness—if and only if it could be expressed, in a language sufficiently rich, without the aid of such referential devices as proper names, proper adjectives and verbs (such as ‘Leibnizian’ and ‘pegasizes’), indexical expressions, and referential uses of definite descriptions. (Adams 1979)

Examples, however, are the best way to make the distinction between qualitative and non-qualitative properties: living in a large city and being the son of a carpenter are examples of qualitative properties; while living in New York and being the son of Henry are examples of non-qualitative properties.

So Adams’ view is that thisnesses are not conjunctions of qualitative properties, but are primitive and non-qualitative. This is the Scotistic notion of thisness—after Duns Scotus who coined the term ‘haecceitas,’ of which ‘thisness’ is a translation—and stands in opposition to the Leibnizian conception of thisness; since Leibniz thought that an individual’s thisness was merely the conjunction of all of its qualitative properties. Furthermore, by ‘individual’, Adams intends any kind of entity which is capable of instantiating properties, e.g., material objects, persons, events, times, etc. (it is another question, of course, whether all of these kinds of entities *have* thisness—I will touch on this below). Based on this conception of thisness, Adams argues i) that there are thisnesses for at least some kinds of individuals (Adams, *op.cit.*), ii) that there are, however, *no* thisnesses of non-actual individuals (Adams 1981), also iii) that there are no thisnesses of individuals that will exist, but that do not exist yet, and finally iv) that there *are* thisnesses of individuals that have existed but no longer exist (Adams 1986). Call the conjunction of iii) and iv) Adams’ Time and Thisness Thesis (TTT). I take TTT to offer an attractive picture of how it is that the past exists while the future does not. Unfortunately for the present discussion, however, Adams does not spell out how such a picture provides a means of escape from the Incoherence objection to the growing universe theory of time. Of course, this really is not a criticism for him, since he is more concerned with offering an account of reference that reflects his

temporally asymmetric ontology, than he is with defending and explicating that ontology. But it would be a criticism of my project if I left the issue unaddressed, so I will need to complete the picture in what follows.

The basic picture that I will begin with is that the existence of the past is manifested in the existence of the thisnesses of past individuals. I will attempt to spell out what this manifestation amounts to in Section 2, below; but first, what kind of past individuals should we identify as playing this role? Adams does not take a view here. Keller (2004) is one commentator who interprets Adams' TTT as a claim about the thisnesses of the *constituents* of past events (e.g., persons, material objects, and even properties) and argues persuasively that such an account faces unpalatable difficulties; furthermore, on my view of time, the fundamental temporal entities are events themselves, not their constituents. For these reasons, the picture I develop here has it that the past exists in the form of the thisnesses of past *events*. This is not to arbitrarily claim that only events have thisness. For my purposes here, I can allow that many different kinds of entity instantiate thisness.<sup>6</sup> It is just to claim that past existence is manifested not in the existence of the thisnesses of the *constituents* of events, but in the existence of the thisnesses of events *themselves*. Again, this position is grounded in my temporal ontology, which takes events to be the fundamental terms of temporal relations (while material objects are the fundamental terms of spatial relations).

I think it is important at this point to deal with some initial concerns regarding the basic picture, and this is what I will do for the remainder of this section, primarily by focusing on Adams' TTT. This process will lead to the amendment of TTT, and in Section 2 I will return to the Incoherence objection and state how the amended picture can answer the

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<sup>6</sup> I am, however, largely sympathetic with the arguments against material objects having thisness (see Diekemper (2009)).



objection. The answer will, in turn, lead to some surprising results, and these will require further defense before concluding the paper.

### *1.3 Initial worries dealt with*

Probably the most important initial worry to deal with is to justify the claims that there are such properties as thisnesses, and that events have them. Contemporary metaphysicians are understandably skeptical of such entities as thisness, and this is why I have devoted an entire paper to defending these claims.<sup>7</sup> I will not recapitulate the arguments of that paper here, but I will say something brief about the intuitive plausibility of the claim that events have thisness. I take this claim to amount to no more than the claim that there is something that it is to be a particular event, and that claim is indeed intuitively plausible. Take, for example, the event of the Battle of Waterloo: the claim I have defended in (2009) and am assuming here is, simply, that if the Battle of Waterloo exists, then there is something that it is to be that particular battle. It will, perhaps, assist the reader in working through the arguments that follow if she bears in mind this intuitive construal of the claim that events have thisness.

Now to deal more circumspectly with some other initial concerns.

#### *1.3.1 Why think the thisnesses of past events still exist?*

Suppose one acknowledges that events do have thisness. Why would one think that an event's thisness would continue to exist even though the event in question is no longer occurring? Adams (1986) provides an intuitive argument, based on temporal asymmetry and ontological dependence, in dealing with this question. Although the argument, by Adams' own admission, is far from conclusive, it has particular appeal for someone who thinks the past exists and the future does not. He begins by arguing that the thisnesses of *future* individuals do *not* exist. This is because, inasmuch as the thisness  $x^*$  of an individual  $x$  depends for its existence upon  $x$ , it would be counter-intuitive to suggest that  $x^*$  could exist

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<sup>7</sup> See Diekemper (2009).

prior to the existence of  $x$  itself. For, suppose that  $x$  comes into existence at  $t$ , and that  $x^*$  exists prior to  $t$ : then prior to  $t$  an entity would exist that depends for its existence on an entity that has not yet come into existence; in which case,  $x$  could not fail to come into existence at  $t$ . But if we think the future is maximally open and undetermined, then we would want to claim that  $x$  might not come into existence at  $t$ , even if we hold fixed all that existed prior to  $t$ ; and this is not a live option if  $x^*$  already exists.

Now, all this purports to show is that the thisnesses of *future* individuals do not exist. What of those of past individuals? Could not the objector use the past directed analogue of the above future directed argument to claim that the thisnesses of *past* individuals do not exist? According to Adams, no, because, intuitively, the past is *not* maximally open. Thus, supposing that  $x$  is a *past* individual, we can allow the present existence of  $x$ 's thisness  $x^*$ , even though doing so necessitates that  $x$  exists at some time; since it *is* (now) necessary that  $x$  did exist (i.e.  $x$ 's having existed is temporally necessary in virtue of  $x$  being past). Given, then, a maximally open future and a closed past, and given the ontological dependence of thisnesses upon the individuals that instantiate them, we should affirm the existence of thisnesses of past individuals.

So if the objector wishes to deny the existence of the thisnesses of past individuals, she cannot use the same argument that Adams uses to deny the existence of the thisnesses of future individuals. Is there some other argument that she could use? Adams does not consider this, but one possibility is that thisnesses might be like Aristotelian universals, inasmuch as they cannot exist uninstantiated. On this view, when a past individual ceases to exist, so does its thisness. But it is not at all clear to me that this should be the case. For one thing, it is not clear that this is what the Aristotelian has in mind in espousing her view. It is one thing to claim that there are no universals corresponding to properties that are never instantiated; it is another to claim that when the last particular instantiating some property

ceases to exist, so does the property (universal) itself. And it is the latter claim that is required for the objection to go through.<sup>8</sup> More importantly, we cannot lose sight of the fact that though thisnesses are properties, they are not universals (given that they are uniquely instantiated). Again, take the Battle of Waterloo. As we saw, above, to say that the Battle of Waterloo has thisness, is to say that there is something that there is to be that particular battle. It strikes me that if there *were* something that it *is* to be the Battle of Waterloo *while* that battle was occurring, then, intuitively, there *remains* something that it *is* to be the Battle of Waterloo, even though the Battle is *no longer* occurring.

These intuitive musings at least provide a presumption in favor of the continued existence of the thisnesses of past individuals. I think that what the musings have shown is that if one believes that the past exists, then this presumption is particularly plausible.

### 1.3.2 Why think that the existence of the thisnesses of past events implies that the past exists?

So the thisnesses of past individuals exist and those of future individuals do not, and it is clear that Adams takes this to imply that the past is real and that the future is not. But, though we have just seen that the present existence of past thisnesses is highly plausible if the past is real, *does* the former *imply* the latter? The presentist would surely want to object to this alleged implication, particularly if she accepted the present existence of past thisnesses. How might she do so? Before speculating on behalf of the presentist, I should first note a difficulty in comparing and contrasting Adams' existential claims with those of the presentist. Adams is explicit that his ontological commitment to past entities is to be expressed in terms of the *primitive* two-place propositional function 'x exists at (a time) t', primitive because it cannot be reduced to the one place propositional function 'x exists' (which Adams takes to be

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<sup>8</sup> Armstrong (1999: 198), who has an Aristotelian theory of universals, endorses what he characterizes as a 'relatively liberal form' of the 'Principle of Instantiation,' according to which the principle ranges over all times.

equivalent to  $(\exists y)(y=x)$ ' (*ibid.*: 321). Even though Adams endorses an analogous reduction in the modal case (whereby 'x exists in a world w' is reduced to 'x exists'), he rejects such a reduction in the temporal case, since he thinks that 'our quantifiers should be understood as ranging, at least, over past as well as present things' (*ibid.*: 322). So Adams acknowledges that he is using a different existential quantifier, in expressing ontological commitments to temporal entities, than both the eternalist and the presentist do. The eternalist and the presentist both express their ontological commitments to temporal entities in terms of the maximally unrestricted quantifier phrase, 'x exists'; that is, in terms of existence *simpliciter*. They simply disagree about what falls within the range of the quantifier. The eternalist thinks that all temporal entities—past, present, and future—tenselessly exist, the presentist thinks that only present entities exist (that is, these are the only temporal entities that there are); but they both agree that whatever exists, exists *simpliciter*. Adams, however, thinks that his ontology requires him to restrict the quantifier to specific times. Given this difference between the presentist's and Adams' use of the existential quantifier, it makes it difficult to adequately capture the disagreement between the two, but in the hypothetical debate that follows, I will endeavor to do so.

At one point in his argument, Adams (1986: 320) acknowledges that in order to affirm the existence of past thisnesses, he must deny that the thisnesses of individuals have the individuals themselves as essential constituents. Let us call the claim that individuals are essential constituents of their thisnesses the Essential Constituents Claim (ECC). As I understand Adams, his point is that if ECC were true, then the thisnesses of individuals could not exist without the individuals themselves *simultaneously* existing; and he does not want to say that past individuals such as the Battle of Waterloo exist presently (they exist at past

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According to this form of the principle, every universal must be instantiated at *some* time, but not necessarily at the present time.

times), even though he does wish to say that that Battle's thisness exists presently.<sup>9</sup> In view of this, the presentist who wished to affirm the existence of the thisnesses of past individuals, while denying the existence of those individuals themselves, should certainly endorse Adams' denial of ECC. So, it is open to the presentist to pose the following question: if ECC is false, then what motivation is there to infer from the present existence of past thisnesses the existence of the past?<sup>10</sup>

To see the force of this objection, suppose an instantaneous past event  $e$ , having thisness  $e^*$ , occurred at  $t_0$ . Suppose, further, that it is presently  $t_1$ . Adams, I take it, would claim that though  $e$  does not exist at  $t_1$  (i.e. presently), its *past* existence at  $t_0$  can presently be affirmed on the basis of  $e^*$ 's existence at  $t_0$  and at all times after  $t_0$  (including  $t_1$ ). Our presentist objector would claim that  $e^*$ 's existence *simpliciter* (i.e. at  $t_1$ ) gives us no ground for positing the existence of  $e$ , other than when  $e$  was present. So at all times after  $t_0$ , the most we can say about  $e$ 's existence is that it obtained when  $t_0$  was present but not that it obtains in the past. The question now is, independently of one's belief about the existence of the past, which of these inferences from the agreed present existence of  $e^*$  is more plausible? In light of Adams' denial of ECC, the presentist could argue that it is more plausible, at  $t_1$ , to infer the non-existence *simpliciter* of  $e$  rather than the (restricted) past existence of  $e$  at  $t_0$ . This is because they both agree on the following three premises: a)  $e$  does not currently exist at  $t_1$  (though the presentist would say ' $e$  does not exist *simpliciter*'), b)  $e^*$  does exist at  $t_1$  (again, the presentist would say ' $e^*$  exists *simpliciter*'), and c)  $e$  is not an essential constituent of  $e^*$ ; so what further premise would Adams offer for  $e$ 's existence at  $t_0$ ?

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<sup>9</sup> I take it that ECC would require either that past individuals exist in the present, or that the thisnesses of past individuals *do not* exist in the present; and, as we have seen, Adams rejects both of these claims.

<sup>10</sup> Again, there is a difficulty here in reconciling Adams' quantifier with the presentist's. I will make this explicit below; but I should emphasize that presently I am simply trying to give my interpretation of Adams' TTT a run for its money. I will be developing my own view (distinct from Adams', but indebted to it) in Section 2.

In Adams' defense, I think there *is* a further premise he could make use of (though he does not explicitly use it in this way). It is a premise that comes in the context of *his* objection to the *presentist* ontology. He claims that the ontological basis of 'the fact that an important battle was fought at Waterloo on June 18, 1815 ... is, or includes, something that was a battle and that does not exist now and is not occurring now' (*ibid.*: 322). Adams grants that this claim rests on intuitions, but they are not intuitions specifically about whether or not the past exists, so this is not a question begging response; they are intuitions about what must be part of the world's ontology in order for a fact or state of affairs to obtain—and also, I take it, in order for the *thisness* of an event to exist. According to Adams, the Battle of Waterloo does not exist presently, but its thisness does, and therefore it would appear that ECC is false. But, unless you are a presentist, the present non-existence of an entity does not rule out the existence of that entity at a past time; and, Adams would say, if you agree with the presentist that it does, then you owe some account of how a fact about a past event or the thisness of that event can exist without anything in the world (present or otherwise) to ground it.

Does the requirement for an ontological basis conflict with Adams' denial of ECC? I think not, because it seems that  $e$  can be the ontological basis of  $e^*$  without being an essential constituent of it. To judge definitively whether this is the case would require an analysis of the notion of essential constituent (as well as ontological ground), something which Adams does not provide and which I will not attempt here. Intuitively, however, it is plausible to maintain that essential constituency is a relation governed by the following conditional: if  $x$  is an essential constituent of  $y$ , then if  $y$  exists now,  $x$  must exist now. But, *prima facie*, is there any such simultaneous existence requirement for  $x$ 's being the ontological basis of  $y$ ? Why would one hold that in order for  $x$  to be the ontological basis of  $y$ , both  $x$  and  $y$  must exist simultaneously? Consider the example of Aristotelian universals again (see above, Section 1.3.1), and suppose that such a universal comes into existence when it is first instantiated, and

continues to exist even after the demise of that instantiation.<sup>11</sup> Here the universal's ontological basis is the instantiation that no longer coexists with it. So, while the presentist might try to argue that the requirement for an ontological basis conflicts with Adams' denial of ECC, I am hard pressed to see that such an argument would go beyond a brute appeal to a presentist ontology.

## 2 Amending the Response

### 2.1 The Incoherence objection dispelled

So where does the foregoing leave our account of past existence? Have we filled out the proposal enough for it to satisfactorily answer the Incoherence objection? My interpretation of Adams' TTT had it that the past exists and provides the ontological basis for the present existence of the thisnesses of past events. This, however, is not quite satisfactory; for if the claim is that the thisnesses of past events exist presently, and past events themselves exist in the past, then it seems that we still fall foul of the Incoherence objection. This is because, on the standard interpretation, what it is for an event to exist is simply for it to occur at some time *t*. I say 'standard', because philosophers of time of all persuasions use these locutions interchangeably. Of course, the precise locutions will vary according to whether one is an eternalist, a presentist, or a growing universe theorist. For example, the eternalist characterizes an event's existence in the following way:

(EE) An event *e* exists *simpliciter* just in case *e* occurs (tenseless) at some time *t*.

The presentist, on the other hand, characterizes an event's existence this way:

(PE) An event *e* exists *simpliciter* just in case *e* is occurring (present tense).

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<sup>11</sup> Another possibility here—one that conforms to Armstrong's version of the principle of instantiation (see n. 8, above)—would be to posit a universal which exists at all times, but which depends for its existence on being instantiated during some finite temporal period.

And Adams, our representative growing universe theorist, claims

(GUE) An event  $e$  exists at a time  $t$  just in case  $e$  is occurring (present tense) or has occurred (past tense) at  $t$ .

Furthermore, as we saw, Adams claims that, with respect to temporal entities, ‘exists at  $t$ ’ is a basic notion that cannot be reduced to ‘exists *simpliciter*’.

Now, these observations bring into relief the nature of the Incoherence objection: the growing universe theorist, in acknowledging that events exist at times other than the present, must allow that these events exist tenselessly. To see this, recall that Adams’ claim is that the correct quantifier phrase for past entities is  $x$  exists at  $t$ , not  $x$  existed at  $t$ ; and clearly  $x$  exists at  $t$  must be a tenseless locution here, and not a present tensed one, given that he was quantifying over *past* events when he made the claim (*ibid.*: 321).<sup>12</sup> So, according to this analysis, the growing universe theorist, as represented by Adams, holds that an event exists (tenseless) at a time  $t$  just in case it is occurring (present tense), or has occurred (past tense), at  $t$ —and this is, indeed, straightforwardly incoherent. An event  $e$  cannot both *exist* (tenseless) at a time  $t$  AND *be occurring* or *have occurred* at  $t$ . In this context, ‘exists at  $t$ ’ and ‘occurs at  $t$ ’ express the same relation, and that relation must therefore either be a tenseless one or a tensed one, but cannot be both. Further, if the growing universe theorist were to attempt to avoid this allegation by claiming that a past event both exists (tenseless) at  $t$  and occurs (tenseless) at  $t$ , then, once again, we lose temporal becoming and thus the dynamic aspect of time (since this characterization of an event’s existence is equivalent to EE, above). In view of all of this, a further adjustment is required to Adams’ TTT in order to avoid the Incoherence objection, and that adjustment depends upon rejecting Adams’ claim

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<sup>12</sup> Tooley is one growing universe theorist who is explicit that past existence is tenseless; even though he, like Adams, maintains that existence at a time is a primitive notion. See Tooley (1997, Chs. 5-6).



that ‘exists at  $t$ ’ cannot be reduced to ‘exists *simpliciter*’, since it was this claim that led to the incoherence.<sup>13</sup>

The adjustment I have in mind will result in a substantially different theory than that proposed by Adams, so although my explication of his views in Section 1 was also a partial defense, from this point forward my views will begin to diverge from his. The first step in amending Adams’ theory is to characterize past existence as existence *simpliciter*, rather than as Adams’ existence at a time, but we will define that existence in terms of occurrence at a time (just as the eternalist and presentist do). The reason for this, again, is to avoid the contradictory claim that events exist tenselessly at  $t$  while also bearing a tensed relation (that of occurrence) to  $t$ . Instead, we will claim that because events exist *simpliciter*, and not at a time, there is no incoherence in their tensed occurrence at a time; indeed, events exist *simpliciter in virtue of* their tensed occurrence at a time. There are, however, two immediate issues that attend this move and must be addressed. The first is that we must now consider all events as being ontologically on a par, given that all events exist *simpliciter*. Again, this is precisely what both the eternalist and the presentist maintain: they both hold that all events have the same ontological status (but they disagree about which events exist). But the growing universe theorist, on the standard view, holds that some events exist presently while others exist in the past; in which case, neither type of event exists *simpliciter*. As we saw, this was precisely why Adams was driven to deny that ‘ $x$  exists at  $t$ ’ could be reduced to ‘ $x$  exists’. There is a way forward, however, for the growing universe theorist, and it is to claim that the *only* events that exist (*simpliciter*) are past events. This claim will no doubt strike the reader as deeply counterintuitive; but I will argue in Sections 2.2 and 2.3 that it is both motivated *and* plausible.

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<sup>13</sup> Thus we see, speaking in Fine’s terms (see Section 1.1), that rejecting *both* Neutrality and Absolutism (i.e. existence *simpliciter*) does not dispel the incoherence.

The second issue follows on from the first. Recall that for the eternalist existence *simpliciter* is tenseless existence (past, present, and future events all exist tenselessly); whereas for the presentist, existence *simpliciter* is present tensed (all events exist presently). What, then, should the growing universe theorist say about the status, with respect to tense, of existence *simpliciter*? If past events exist *simpliciter*, then they can neither exist presently, nor can they exist at a past time, and therefore it appears that they must exist tenselessly; but does this not just raise the specter of incoherence again? I think not. The earlier incoherence resulted from the claim that events exist tenselessly at a time, but the revised claim is that they exist *simpliciter* in virtue of having occurred at a past time, and there is no obvious incoherence in this claim. Here, then, is the amended characterization of an event's existence, reflecting the existence *simpliciter* of past events:

(GUE') An event *e* exists *simpliciter* just in case *e* has occurred at *t*.

So, even though the existence *simpliciter* here must be interpreted as tenseless existence, it does not contradict the claim that *e* occurred at *t*, since *e* does not exist (tenseless) *at t* (it exists (tenseless) *simpliciter*). In light of GUE', what should we say now about Nero and his thought about the present? The reality of the past, on this view, does *not* entail that events occur (tenselessly) in the past. So the event of Nero watching a gladiator bout and thinking about the present is not tenselessly occurring at the spatiotemporal location of Rome, AD 60. Nero's thinking about the present is not occurring at any time, rather, his thinking about the present *has* occurred, and exists *simpliciter*.

What of Adams' time and thisness thesis (TTT)? Well, we may still wish to ask *what it is* for an event which has occurred to exist *simpliciter*. It is one thing to define an event's existence in such a way, it is quite another to explain how such existence is possible. What kinds of things are these events which exist but are no longer occurring? Some, in fact, would claim that this characterization of events involves a category mistake: events are

occurents, not existents, it is *things* (substances) which exist. And even supposing that there is no category mistake, what ontological grounds do we have for claiming that past events exist, if their existence is grounded in their having occurred? I think an amended version of Adams' TTT can help us make sense of these issues. Though the original TTT (see Section 1.2, above) was a general account of any individual's thisness and its relation to time, consider the following version, which is specific to an *event's* thisness, and which reflects the conclusions of this section:

(TTT'): The thisness  $e^*$  of an event  $e$  exists *simpliciter* just in case  $e$  has occurred at  $t$ .

Notice how similar the structure of this thesis is to GUE'. I think there is scope here to relate an event to its thisness in such a way that we can legitimately and helpfully characterize an event's existence *simpliciter* in terms of the existence *simpliciter* of its thisness. This I will attempt to do in Section 2.4.

## 2.2 Present events and the argument from ontic determinacy

I argued above that the growing universe theorist can avoid the Incoherence objection if she is willing to reject the existence of present events. My goal in this sub-section is to argue for that rejection independently of a solution to the Incoherence objection (though not independently of the growing universe theory). As we have seen, the presentist stipulates that present existence is existence *simpliciter*. This stipulation is supposed to be highly intuitive, since we experience the present directly, and nothing could be more real than the objects of direct experience. But the present is notoriously vague and indeterminate, since what is happening presently has yet to fully occur. How do we designate the present moment? It seems the only way to do so is by ostension, but no sooner do we utter, '*This* is the present moment', than the token of that utterance becomes false. Consider, further, that if the past is real, and the future is not, then so called present events have temporal parts which lack a

concrete reality; since they have not yet come into existence. But this idea, that there exist concrete events with non-existent parts, hardly seems coherent. If it is not coherent, then what does this incoherence tell us about the existential status of present events?

These considerations point towards what I call the argument from ontic determinacy. The argument plays a pivotal role in the response to the Incoherence objection, since it has ontological ramifications that clearly distinguish that response from the presentist's account of past existence, but which also yield a version of the growing universe theory which is immune to the Incoherence objection. We will first take a look at the argument, then consider its ramifications for the growing universe theory, before moving on to deal with any intuitive worries it might engender. The first step in the argument is to note the semantic difficulty of designating 'the present'. Of course, if we think of 'the present' in terms of 'the present century', or 'the present year', or 'the present day', then there is no great difficulty here. The difficulty, however, arises when we attempt to designate the present *moment*—the instant at which all earlier times are past, and all later times are future. Given the dynamic nature of time, the present moment is constantly changing (by becoming past), and thus any event that occurs at that moment cannot be designated until it is past.

Why should we feel motivated to limit the scope of the present so narrowly? Perhaps if one were a presentist or an eternalist one would not feel so motivated, but the growing universe theorist can hardly allow the present to be designated by intervals of centuries, years, or days; since, by her lights, the end of the present day (and so *a fortiori* the present year or present century) is still future and therefore does not yet exist. The reason that the presentist and the eternalist need not share this motivation is that, on their respective views, there is no time  $t$  at which all events earlier than  $t$  exist, and all events later than  $t$  do not exist. According to eternalism, *all* events earlier *and* later than  $t$  exist, and so the question of a temporal region or boundary between existence and non-existence does not even arise.

According to presentism, *no* events earlier *or* later than the present time exist, and here, of course, there is the issue of a temporal distinction between existence and non-existence; but need this distinction involve a sharp, instantaneous cut-off at the ‘edge of becoming,’ as in the case of the growing universe theory? Arguably not. Assuming that presentism requires that at least some present events are non-instantaneous, then such events must be wholly located in the present, and this entails that the present itself is a temporally extended *region*, rather than a point-like *boundary*. Thus, for the presentist, there is a period  $t_0$ - $t_1$  (i.e. the present period) such that all events earlier and later than that period do not exist. How this period is defined is not clear to me, but, unless all events are instantaneous, it cannot be characterized as an instantaneous boundary. So it is only on the growing universe theory, given its asymmetric ontology, that there must be a sharp cut-off between that which exists and that which does not.

This point leads to the second step in the argument from ontic determinacy—one which relies upon the asymmetric ontology just noted. Again, given that ontology, at any present moment of time  $t$  events having occurred earlier than  $t$  exist, while those that will occur later than  $t$  do not exist. Now, a non-instantaneous event  $e$  that occurs at  $t$ , where  $t$  is present, can only bear one of three possible relations to  $t$ : either 1)  $t$  is the last moment of  $e$ ’s existence (i.e.  $e$  has just finished occurring at  $t$ ), or 2)  $t$  is the first moment of  $e$ ’s existence (i.e.  $e$  has begun to occur at  $t$ ), or 3)  $e$  is presently occurring at  $t$  by straddling  $t$  (i.e.  $e$  has some temporal parts that are earlier than  $t$ , and some that are later than  $t$ ). Given the ontology of the growing universe theory, however, 2) is clearly not an option, since no event exists later than the present moment  $t$ . 1) clearly *is* an option, since the growing universe theory affirms the existence of past events. What, then, should we make of 3)? If  $e$  has temporal parts that are later than  $t$ , then those parts are future, and are therefore—on the growing universe theory—non-existent. The result of endorsing 3) is thus to endorse the view that

non-instantaneous events have non-existent (because future) temporal parts. But should we allow the existence of such entities, or should we deny that reality admits of concrete events with non-existent temporal parts, and is rather constituted by determinate events? If the latter is the correct answer, then 1) is the correct account of the relation that a non-instantaneous event  $e$ , occurring at the present moment  $t$ , bears to  $t$ ; and thus  $e$  is not a present event at all, but a past one. Furthermore, this conclusion, if true, generalizes for all non-instantaneous events; since, if no such events ever bear the relations specified in 2) or 3), then no such events are future or present, and thus all such events are past.

Henceforth, I will interpret the conclusion that all non-instantaneous events are past as implying that all events, whatsoever, are past. I offer three reasons for accepting this implication. First, I take it that events are fundamentally changes, and changes require some non-zero duration (they *take* time). Second, in ordinary language when we refer to ‘present events,’ we do not intend to refer to instantaneous events, and thus qualifying the claim that there are no present events by saying that there are no *non-instantaneous* present events would hardly assuage those who thought there *were* present events. Third, it is not at all clear what work instantaneous events, on their own, can do in a philosophically satisfying theory of time (I take it, for example, that events with non-zero duration cannot be built up out of instantaneous events). None of this, however, is to rule out the existence of present instantaneous *states*, as distinct from events. Indeed, as will become clear in Section 2.3 (below), these have a role to play in the present theory.<sup>14</sup>

It is important to realize that this *is* an *ontic*, not a semantic, argument. The indeterminate events which the argument from ontic determinacy rejects are not so called

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<sup>14</sup> I should note that I am happy to acknowledge instantaneous events as *theoretical* entities, and simply claim that there are no natural events that could be instantaneous. In support of this position, Simons (2003: 377)

because the truth about them is indeterminate, as in the case of ‘it is indeterminate whether event  $e$  will end in such and such a way.’ Rather,  $e$  is indeterminate, according to the argument from ontic determinacy, because it is a concrete particular which has certain parts (namely, the future ones) which do not exist. The point about not being able to designate or describe a present event served simply to highlight this ontological picture: if the future does not exist, then there is literally nothing to describe later than the utterance of the description.

It is also important not to conflate the concept of indeterminate event which I am rejecting here with the notion of metaphysical indeterminacy.<sup>15</sup> The latter notion, if I understand it correctly, deals with indefinite existence; but indefinite existence is not a relevant concept in the current context. This is an important point, because one might be tempted to interpret the *non-existence* of the future on the growing universe theory rather as indefinite existence. The thought being that it is indefinite what will happen, but *something* will happen. It is, however, metaphysically possible at the present time  $t$  that time come to an end at  $t + 1$  (i.e. that no events occur after time  $t$ ). Given this possibility, the growing universe theorist cannot allow the indefinite existence of the future, but only its non-existence *simpliciter*. Thus it is not metaphysically indeterminate whether the events described by option 3) exist, since they have some parts that definitely do exist, and some parts that definitely do not exist. In short, my rejection of option 3), which yields the conclusion that all events are past, is based not on a rejection of some general notion of metaphysical indeterminacy, but on the peculiar notion of an indeterminate event engendered by 3).

If the argument from ontic determinacy is correct, and there are no such entities as present events on a growing universe theory of time, then this supports the earlier claim that

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points out that modern physics appears to show that no event can be registered below the minimum time span of 10-43 seconds (the so-called Planck time).

past existence is existence *simpliciter*. Events are determinate and complete entities which have fully occurred, and thus the only events that exist *simpliciter* are past events. Since I reject the notion of an indeterminate event, and since so called ‘present’ events are indeterminate on the growing universe theory, I deny the existence of ‘present’ events.

All of this is not to claim, however, (as the presentist does about the past) that the present is unreal. The present does not designate a temporal region at all; rather, it is the ever shifting boundary between what is real (the past) and what is unreal (the future). Consider the spatial analogy of a border between spatial regions. The border is not a spatial region itself, it does not contain objects; rather, it carves up the spatial regions which themselves contain objects. Similarly, the present is the temporal border between past and future. Of course, this analogy is not a strict one, since time on the present view is dynamic, whereas space is static. So in the temporal case we would have to think of the boundary of the present as always ‘moving,’ and of the future ‘region’ as not containing anything at all. Perhaps a stricter analogy (though with a less familiar analogue) would be a one dimensional analogy: if time is like a line growing in length from one end, then the present is like the point located at the growing end of the line. On this account, then, the fundamental mode of temporal existence is captured *not* by ‘is’ or ‘is becoming’, but by ‘has become’ or ‘has occurred’ (as reflected in GUE’, above). Henceforth, I will refer to this version of the growing universe theory as ‘pastism.’

### 2.3 Counter-intuitive?

Now to address the incredulous stares. One intuitive worry that threatens to derail pastism from the outset concerns the status of statements which purport to refer to present events; since the view has the consequence that, technically speaking, there are no truthmakers for

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<sup>15</sup> See, for example, Barnes and Williams (2011), Barnes (2010), and, with specific respect to *temporal* metaphysical indeterminacy, Cameron and Barnes (2009).



such statements. But this concern is easily dealt with by claiming that present tensed statements are really about events that have only just occurred—that is, events that are complete at the moment that the statement has been uttered. And there are truthmakers for these events, since they are past. So pastism does not entail that the events that we normally call present are, as it turns out, non-existent. Rather, it entails that such events are not, as it turns out, present—they are past.

It will be helpful here to consider a couple of examples. First, take the event of my typing this sentence: this event exists, it is just that the referent of that existential claim is an entity that does not have as one of its constituents the typing of a full stop. (If I were to refer to the same event *now*, of course, it would!). So the truthmaker for the existential claim that occurs half way through the previous sentence is an event that only includes the typing of half of a sentence, and that event became past at the moment the reference was made. As another example, consider the statement ‘The Obama presidency has helped improve the world’s opinion of the United States,’ as uttered at 1600 BST on 4 June 2012. This statement purports to be about the present event of the Obama presidency, but I deny that there is such an entity, so how can the statement be true (assuming that it is)? Again, it is not that the Obama presidency is non-existent; rather, the event referred to in the statement above exists, but it is an event that *ceased to occur* at the time the statement was uttered. Of course, this means that if one were to utter the statement one minute later at 1601, the truthmaker for *that* statement would be a different event. But this is a direct consequence of the dynamic nature of time according to the growing universe theory: the sum total of existence is continuously increasing, which means new events are coming into existence with every passing moment of time. Now, when the Obama presidency has come to an end, the truthmaker for true claims made about it will just be the one event spanning eight years; but in addition to the existence of that one event, a future commentator will also be able to quantify over every stage of the

presidency, each of which is also an event. And it is these past entities that serve as truthmakers for present tensed claims made *during* the presidency.

Another intuitive worry that pastism gives rise to has to do with the so called ‘privileged present,’ and the significance of present experience. The thought is that present experience, in virtue of its directness, matters more to us than remembered past experiences. I can imagine that presentists, in particular, will be bristling with indignation at this point in my presentation of pastism: ‘At least the B-Theorists acknowledge the *subjective* significance of present experience. You are either denying it, or relegating it to the same significance as long past experiences!’ Fortunately, this allegation is only half true. The truth contained in it is that, on the pastist view, the experience which came into existence only a moment ago has precisely the same objective reality as a long past experience. Indeed, inasmuch as all events are past, they are all equally real. The reason that the presentist finds this view so unpalatable is because the A-Theory is supposed to be a common sense theory, and common sense tells us that there is something special about the present—and, in particular, about present experience.<sup>16</sup> For my part, I do not deny the importance of the ‘privileged present,’ but my claim is that present experience is *at* the present, not *in* it (again, think of the border and point analogies). The closer an experience is to the present, the more vivid it is psychologically, and thus the more real it is *to the subject*.

This explains how the allegation above is *not* accurate: I am not denying the subjective significance of present experience, I am merely redefining it and accounting for it on the basis of a different ontology than does the presentist. Present experience, on the pastist view, is experience that is immediately *adjacent* to the present, where the present is conceived as the boundary between past and future (i.e. between existence and non-

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<sup>16</sup> See Zimmerman (2008) for a recent articulation of this view and the problem that it is supposed to create for the growing universe theory.

existence). Furthermore, this ontological picture *objectively* grounds the subjective significance of present experience, where the B-Theorist's ontology does not; since the pastist ontology, unlike the B-Theoretic one, acknowledges the objectivity of the present. Nonetheless, the pastist view does call for an explanation, similar to that of the B-Theorist's, in accounting for some of our other pre-theoretic beliefs about the present. This is because we pre-theoretically believe not only that present experience is privileged, but also that *there are* present events. The pastist explanation for *this* belief, I suggest, is best offered in terms of the *continuity* of experience.

On the pastist view, if we think of experiences as events, then all experience is past, since all events are past; but I think that the view can also accommodate *states* of conscious awareness, where these states are *not* temporally extended entities, and can therefore be conceived as simultaneous with the boundary (or point) of the present. Thus, the subject of experience can be in a 'present' state of conscious awareness, but the objects of this awareness are experiences that *are* temporally extended, and which are therefore past (given the argument from ontic determinacy). What this means is that the temporally extended objects of our conscious awareness are all memories, even though the *state* of being aware of them is simultaneous with the present. Now, past experiences that are adjacent to the present constitute such immediate memories, and are so seamlessly joined in our consciousness to subsequent, *more* immediate memories, that we subjectively locate some indefinite set of the most immediate memories in the specious present. This, I suggest, is the ground of the common sense conception of the privileged present. So the pastist must acknowledge that at least some of our beliefs about the present are based merely in subjective experience, and not in objective reality; but this acknowledgment does nothing to diminish the objective underpinnings of that subjective experience.

#### 2.4 Pastism and Thisness

We are now in position to consider the role of thisness in pastism, and how we should conceive of the relationship between events and their thisnesses. In Section 2.1 I concluded that an event  $e$  exists *simpliciter* in virtue of its having occurred at some past time  $t$ . So even though  $e$ 's existence ontologically depends upon its having occurred, it's existence does not depend upon its *continuing* to occur. How is this possible? Given TTT' from Section 2.1, the natural move is to attempt to capture the existence *simpliciter* of  $e$  in terms of  $e$ 's thisness  $e^*$ ; but it is not immediately clear what terms the relationship between  $e$  and  $e^*$  should take. Earlier in Section 1 I characterized the relationship in terms of manifestation: the existence of  $e$  is manifested in the existence of  $e^*$ . This is not very helpful, however, since it fails to tell us what it is for a thisness to manifest the existence of its past individual. Is it just for the past individual to *exist as* its thisness? 'Existing as' does not seem any more helpful in this regard than 'manifested by.' Furthermore, if an event  $e$  only exists *simpliciter* when it has fully occurred (as per the argument from ontic determinacy), and then exists as its thisness  $e^*$ , what is the entity that occurred at  $t$ ? Is it just  $e^*$ —can thisnesses 'occur'; or is it some entity  $e$  distinct from  $e^*$ ? If the latter, then how can the existence of  $e$  be captured by  $e^*$ ? In short, what is the ontological relationship between  $e$  and  $e^*$  at time  $t$ , and how does that relationship allow us to claim after  $t$  that  $e$  exists in virtue of  $e^*$ 's existence?

The most straightforward way to deal with these perplexities is simply to claim that  $e$  is, indeed, identical to  $e^*$ . Again, consider the structural similarity between GUE' and TTT':

(GUE') An event  $e$  exists *simpliciter* just in case  $e$  has occurred at  $t$ .

(TTT'): The thisness  $e^*$  of an event  $e$  exists *simpliciter* just in case  $e$  has occurred at  $t$ .

Both  $e$  and  $e^*$  share the same existence conditions, and so we should claim that they are identical. This is all well and good, but what we now require is an explanation of how an event can be identical to its thisness. Here we need not only an account of how a thisness

instantiates its individual, but also an account of the nature of events, such that an event could both instantiate its thisness *and* be identical to its thisness. I develop such accounts in my (2013) and (manuscript), but I can only provide a brief sketch of the accounts here. The sketch will, however, suffice to make conceptual room for the intended ontology of thisness and events.

Thisnesses are abstract properties in that they can exist without the individuals that instantiate them; but they are not universals, since, necessarily, they can only be instantiated uniquely. In that, they are like tropes, except that they are not *accidental* properties as are tropes (that is, thisnesses are both unique *and* essential to their bearers). Now, there is a non-nominalistic view of tropes that takes them to be concrete instantiations of abstract universals. On this view, for example, the blueness of my shirt is a unique, concrete instantiation of the abstract blue universal.<sup>17</sup> My suggestion is that we model thisness on this universal/trope instantiation structure, whereby an individual  $x$ , coming into existence at  $t$ , concretely instantiates a thisness trope; but where the thisness trope is an instantiation *of* an abstract property—the thisness property—which exists *simpliciter* from  $t$ , even though the individual  $x$  ceases to exist at some time  $t + n$ . Of course, given that thisnesses are not exactly like either universals or tropes, we would have to think of these aspects of thisness as *quasi* universals and tropes. This model is particularly apt in the case of events, since what we require is both a concrete entity that has occurred in time (event  $e$ ), and an abstract entity that exists *simpliciter* after  $e$  has occurred ( $e$ 's thisness  $e^*$ ). But if we are going to claim that  $e = e^*$ , then we require something more.

How can an event just be identical to its thisness? Well, given that there are plausible trope theories of events extant, there is scope to claim that the event  $e$  which has occurred at  $t$

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<sup>17</sup> See Lowe (2006: Ch. 4).

just is a concrete, trope-like instantiation of the abstract, thisness property  $e^*$ .<sup>18</sup> The thought here is that we characterize an event's having occurred in terms of a thisness property having been instantiated *by* its thisness trope—perhaps *in* a spatio-temporal region. We have to bear in mind that a 'thisness trope' is not what is standardly called a trope; i.e. it is neither accidental nor qualitative. Still, inasmuch as the thisness trope is a necessarily unique, concrete entity which is instantiated in space and time, it is trope-like. The thisness trope is, in turn, an instantiation *of* the abstract thisness property; and it is the latter which exists *simpliciter*.<sup>19</sup>

So, on this account, the occurrence of an event is the instantiation of an event thisness property by its thisness trope. Since, according to pastism, all events have occurred and exist *simpliciter*, all event thisness properties have been instantiated by their thisness tropes and exist *simpliciter*. Further, although thisness properties exist *simpliciter* and tenselessly, they have come into existence in virtue of their thisness tropes having been instantiated at past times. And there is no incoherence in tenseless existence as of a time, as long as the ontological distinction between an abstract thisness property and its concrete trope-like instantiation is kept in view. The Incoherence objection resulted from claiming (or implying) that one and the same event both tenselessly exists at a past time  $t$  and has occurred at  $t$ . Given the present distinction between an event's occurrence (i.e. the instantiation of a thisness property by its thisness trope) and its existence (i.e. the existence of the abstract thisness property), however, the growing universe theorist can claim that events come into

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<sup>18</sup> For two different versions of trope theories of events, see Bennett (1988) and Cleland (1991).

<sup>19</sup> One might think that this revisionist account of events is inconsistent with my claim in Section 1 that events are fundamental entities. Given, however, that thisnesses are individuating principles, and not qualitative properties, I do not take my account of events in terms of the instantiation of event thisnesses to be a reductive one. See Diekemper (2013).

existence in virtue of their *having occurred* as of a time  $t$ , but then exist *simpliciter* and tenselessly.<sup>20</sup>

### *Conclusion*

To sum up, the point of this paper has been to present a defence of the growing universe theory of time against the Incoherence objection; first, by presenting a dynamic theory that provides a coherent account of past existence, and then by working through some of the ramifications of that theory. One of these ramifications is the rather surprising thesis that present events do not exist. We saw, however, that we were able to *objectively* account for our common sense beliefs about the present, with minimal damage to our other deeply held intuitions about time. Indeed, if anything is clear and certain to philosophers of time, it is that something has ‘got to go’ in the formulation of a precise theory of time. There is no theory of time that does not call for some revision of our commonly accepted terminology and beliefs, and this is why grasping the nature of time is so difficult. The B-Theorist must revise our common sense concept of change; the presentist must reject our common sense concept of past existence; and—if my arguments are sound—the growing universe theorist must revise our common sense concept of the present.

The latter of these seems to me by far the least of three evils—especially given that there is a common sense story that underlies the esoteric metaphysical conclusions associated with pastism. That story goes something like this: Time passes in virtue of events occurring (i.e. coming into existence), but there are no events that have not occurred, and when an event has occurred, then there is something that it is to have been that event. That is the common

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<sup>20</sup> Do my amendments to Adams’ theory require me to embrace ECC (see Section 1.3.2, above)? Trivially, yes, though it is important to see that Adams had to deny ECC only because he claimed that  $e$  exists at  $t$  (where  $t$  is a past time). Since I am claiming that  $e$  exists *simpliciter*, I do not have to deny ECC in order to affirm the existence *simpliciter* of  $e^*$  (the existence of  $e^*$  just is the existence of  $e$ ).

sense story that pastism and its ontology rests upon; and it is one, on my view, that justifies and necessitates the ontology.

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