Thisnesses, Propositions, and Truth

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In this paper, I argue that presentists, who believe that only present objects exist, should accept a thisness ontology. That is, presentists should endorse the view that there are thisnesses of past and present entities; for a given x, x's thisness is the property *being-x* or *being-identical-with-x*. A thisness ontology has been suggested before, e.g. Adams (1986) and Diekemper (2015), but no one has yet acknowledged the considerable work that such an ontology can do in defence of presentism.[1] Here, I propose a version of presentism that incorporates a thisness ontology, '*Thisness Presentism*'. I argue that this view solves important problems facing standard versions of presentism.

The plan for the paper is as follows. In §1, I articulate my proposed thisness ontology, noting the influence of Adams and Diekemper, in the context of developing Thisness Presentism. In §2, I introduce two important problems facing presentism, concerning (i) the existence of structured singular propositions about merely past objects and (ii) the truth of propositions about the past. Neither problem for presentism seems to have been convincingly dealt with in the extant literature to date. In §3, I use the proposed ontology to solve both problems and argue that this constitutes good indirect support for Thisness Presentism. Finally, in §4, I distinguish my view from others in the literature (e.g. Keller, 2004).

1.   Thisnesses and Presentism

A 'thisness' is a particular, primitive, purely non-qualitative property of an object; the property of being a certain object. For a given x, x's thisness is the property *being-x* or *being-identical-with-x*. For example, Barack Obama's thisness is the property *being-identical-with-Obama*. This basic idea can be sketched in various ways, but my concern is to develop a notion of thisness that will vindicate presentism. I propose the following picture:

(a)   *The Nature of a Thisness*—every object instantiates a thisness; a thisness is a particular, primitive, purely non-qualitative property of an object.

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[1]   Keller (2004: 96-99) proposes that presentists accept a thisness ontology in order to solve the 'truth-maker problem' for presentism. Keller's view, called *'Haecceitist Presentism'*, is an important precursor to the view articulated in this paper, but Haecceitist Presentism is both underdeveloped and under-defended. My contribution in this paper is to develop and defend a parallel view ('*Thisness Presentism*') in much more detail and to show what work a thisness ontology can do for presentists. I discuss the truth-maker problem for presentism in §§2-3 and I distinguish my view from Keller's view in §4. For more on Thisness Presentism, see Ingram (2016).

(b)   *The Life of a Thisness*—a thisness T comes into being with an object x, T is uniquely instantiated by x throughout x's existence, and T continues to exist uninstantiated when x has ceased to exist.

(c)   *The Character of a Thisness*—a thisness T instantiates higher-order properties, which characterise the object that instantiates T, x; the relevant properties of T initially correspond to the lower-order properties of x.

With respect to (a) and (b), I follow Adams (1986) and Diekemper (2015), but the addition of (c) enables me to develop my view, Thisness Presentism. In §§1.1-1.3, I look more closely at this view, before turning to the problems facing presentism in §2.

1.1.   <u>The Nature of a Thisness</u>

Every object has a thisness and thisnesses are properties of a novel sort, i.e. they are particular, primitive, purely non-qualitative properties (Adams, 1979). Two things should be noted about this characterisation. First, thisnesses are non-qualitative properties. A precise account of the distinction between qualitative and non-qualitative properties is elusive, but non-qualitative properties seem to involve objects, in a sense, and qualitative properties do not. For instance, the property *being-a-homeowner* is qualitative whereas *being-the-owner-of-1600-Pennsylvania-Avenue* is non-qualitative. Thisnesses are non-qualitative since they involve objects in this way; Obama's thisness, for instance, is non-qualitative since it involves Obama. Nevertheless, thisnesses can exist in the absence of the objects they involve. (I return to this point below in §1.2.) Second, thisnesses are primitive properties. As such, thisnesses cannot be reduced to (or analysed in terms of) any purely qualitative properties or relations to other objects. Qua primitive properties, thisnesses are to be understood as simple, unstructured entities.

Thisnesses are properties, but they comprise a sui generis category of properties. Thisnesses are like other properties in certain key respects, but do not fit into one particular category. Diekemper (2015) makes this point neatly, as follows:

> '[Thisnesses] resist categorization under other common property kinds: they are like universals in that they seem to be abstract, and they are like essences in that they are essential to their bearers, but since they are also necessarily unique to their bearers, they are not universal! In their uniqueness, they are like tropes (conceived of as individual accidents), except that they are not accidental. So thisnesses are neither universals, nor mere essences, nor individual accidents, rather they are *individual essences*; and, as such, it is not clear which category they fall under or how one ought to conceive of their ontology.' (Diekemper, 2015: 50)

Since thisnesses cannot be understood as belonging to any 'common property kinds', as Diekemper puts it, I treat them as members of a distinct, sui generis category. The positive account of thisnesses as properties (of a novel kind) is as follows: thisnesses are abstract, essential, unique, and non-accidental.

1.2.   The Life of a Thisness

For a given object x, x's thisness T comes into being with x, T is uniquely instantiated by x throughout x's existence, and T continues to exist uninstantiated when x has ceased to exist (Adams, 1986). Thus there are thisnesses of past and present objects, but no thisnesses of (merely) future objects. For example, Caesar's thisness (*being-identical-with-Caesar*) did not exist before Caesar existed. Caesar's thisness came into being with Caesar, was uniquely instantiated by Caesar throughout his life, and exists uninstantiated after Caesar ceased to exist. This view of thisness permanence is adapted from Adams (1986). In what follows, I briefly propose a way to understand this view, acceptable to presentists.

A thisness (e.g. *being-identical-with-x*) can exist without the relevant object (x). But, x's thisness cannot exist *before* x exists; it can only continue to exist *after* x has existed. Thisnesses are contingent existents. In an important sense, x's thisness depends upon x for its existence: x's thisness, for instance, could not exist if x never exists. To illustrate, consider Caesar's thisness. The existence of Caesar's thisness implies a relation with Caesar that could not obtain were it the case that Caesar had never existed. Importantly, this is not to claim that Caesar's thisness cannot exist if Caesar does not exist now. One way to capture the relation between thisness and object is as follows: x's thisness ontologically depends on x insofar as x's thisness could not exist without the *initial existence* of x. However, this ontological dependence does not imply that x's thisness must cease to exist once x ceases to exist. The initial existence of x is sufficient for the existence of x's thisness; the loss of x does not necessitate the loss of x's thisness. But, since ontological dependence (standardly construed) is a relation, and a relation cannot hold unless its relata exist, the relationship of ontological dependence between an object and its thisness should not be construed in the standard way. The solution to this problem is that x's thisness ontologically depends on x in a 'non-rigid' way, following Diekemper (2015).

Diekemper (2015) introduces the idea that x's thisness 'non-rigidly' ontologically depends on x, attributing the notion to Lowe (2006). The 'non-rigidity' of the dependence is temporal (rather than modal). The basic idea is: the existence of x's thisness, T, ontologically depends on x's initial existence, but T doesn't continue to depend on x; T merely has depended on x (2015: 65-66). Put differently, T depends on the initial existence,

not the continuing existence, of x. This is how to understand the relationship of temporal non-rigid ontological dependence involved in the thisness ontology presented here.[2]

One might question whether T always non-rigidly depends upon x. The answer is no. The relationship of dependence does not always hold. It cannot hold, for instance, when x does not exist. But this is no problem given non-rigid ontological dependence. There is some time at which T ontologically depends on x, i.e. the initial existence of x.

Here is a putative definition of asymmetric, temporal, non-rigid ontological dependence:

(NRD)   x non-rigidly ontologically depends on y $=_{df}$ (i) Necessarily, x exists only if y has existed; and, (ii) it is not the case that, necessarily, y exists only if x has existed.[3]

This notion of dependence, (NRD), captures the idea that if x depends on y for its existence, x cannot exist without the initial existence of y. (NRD) also allows that x does not depend for its existence on the existence of its thisness. This illustrates the sense in which x's thisness depends on x, but this is not the whole story. (As stated, x's thisness does not continue to depend on x for its existence; the relation obtains for an instant; x and x's thisness come into being at the same moment.) To be clear, (NRD) is a variety of *ontological* dependence, not merely *causal* dependence; the way in which x's thisness depends on x is ontological, not causal.

1.3.   The Character of a Thisness

The third aspect of the thisness ontology proposed is that x's thisness, T, instantiates higher-order properties that indirectly characterise x, and such properties initially correspond to the lower-order properties of x. Put another way, an important class of the higher-order properties instantiated by a thisness indirectly characterise the object that initially instantiates the thisness (in virtue of characterising the thisness itself). Consider, for example, Obama's thisness. Obama's thisness instantiates second-order properties that characterise itself and that indirectly characterise Obama, e.g. Obama's thisness presently instantiates *being-the-thisness-of-a-President*.

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[2]   The thisness ontology proposed is inspired by Adams (1979; 1981; 1986). And, an important precursor to my view is suggested by Keller (2004). Neither Adams nor Keller fully develops an account of the relationship between object and thisness, nor do they explain how a thisness ontologically depends on an object. The proposal that the relationship between object and thisness is one of asymmetric, temporal, non-rigid ontological dependence is an important aspect of making a thisness ontology acceptable to presentists, building upon Adams's and Keller's accounts.

[3]   Compare a standard 'rigid' notion of ontological dependence, e.g. (RD) x rigidly ontologically depends on y $=_{df}$ (i) Necessarily, x exists only if y exists; and, (ii) it is not the case that, necessarily, y exists only if x exists (cf. Lowe, 2010: §1). It is worth noting that there is some dissatisfaction with such modal formulations of ontological dependence theses in the extant literature. (See, e.g., Koslicki (2012; 2013) for discussion of alternatives.) Even so, I take it that my account can serve as a helpful heuristic, even for those unconvinced by modal formulations of dependence theses.— I'm grateful to an anonymous reviewer for making this point.

One way to explain this feature of thisnesses is to note that the relevant second-order properties of Obama's thisness correspond to Obama's first-order properties. A thisness, T, gains higher-order properties that indirectly characterise its object, x, as a natural part of the relationship between object and thisness; T instantiates higher-order properties that correspond to x's lower-order properties. The relevant properties of T also depend (in a sense) on x's properties, e.g. Obama's thisness instantiates *being-the-thisness-of-a-President* because Obama instantiates *being-President*. Obama's thisness would not instantiate the second-order property if Obama never instantiated the corresponding first-order property. Put simply, if Obama was not President, Obama's thisness would not be the thisness of a President; so, if Obama never instantiates *being-President*, Obama's thisness would not instantiate *being-the-thisness-of-a-President*.

Similarly, x's thisness T loses properties as a natural part of the relationship between x and T. A thisness, T, cannot lose a higher-order property that indirectly characterises x unless x loses the corresponding lower-order property. Obama's thisness cannot lose *being-the-thisness-of-a-President* unless Obama loses the corresponding *being-President*. This is necessary (but not sufficient) for a thisness to lose this kind of property: T instantiates higher-order properties because x has instantiated corresponding lower-order properties. The loss of a property by x is not sufficient for T to lose a corresponding property; in order for T to change with respect to a given property, there must be a sense in which the property no longer correctly characterises T. The circumstances according to which a property fails to correctly characterise its bearer are plain. Obama's thisness cannot lose *being-the-thisness-of-a-President* unless this property fails to correctly characterise the thisness (its bearer). This property fails to correctly characterise the thisness only if Obama's thisness is not the thisness of a President. Of course, if Obama has been President, but is no longer, then Obama's thisness will no longer be the thisness of a President but instead be the thisness of a past President (and instantiate *having-been-the-thisness-of-a-President*). There is an added complication here concerning tensed properties, e.g. *having-been-the-thisness-of-a-President*, which I return to in §3.

1.4.   Thisness Presentism

The thisness ontology proposed has three distinct elements: (a) a thisness is a particular, primitive, purely non-qualitative property of an object, the property of being identical with that object; (b) a thisness comes into being with an object, is uniquely instantiated by that object throughout its existence, and continues to exist uninstantiated when the object has ceased to exist; and, (c) a thisness instantiates higher-order properties, which indirectly characterise the object that instantiates it, and the relevant properties of the thisness initially correspond to the lower-order properties of its object.

Presentists, who believe only present objects exist, can accept the proposed thisness ontology since it does not violate the ontological scruples of presentism. Although there are thisnesses of past entities, there is no ontological commitment to past entities themselves. Caesar's thisness, for instance, is not constituted by

Caesar, since thisnesses, qua primitive (simple, unstructured) properties, do not have constituents (§1.1). Further, although Caesar's thisness ontologically depends on Caesar, the dependence is construed as non-rigid and so a thisness only depends on the initial existence of the relevant object, not its continued existence (§1.2).

In what remains, I argue that presentists should accept the proposed thisness ontology because it helps to solve two important problems facing presentism. In §2, I introduce the problems and, in §3, I show how the proposed ontology solves them. This provides good indirect support for the thisness ontology.

2.   **Two Problems for Presentism**

2.1.   Constituency and Truth-Making

Presentism is the view that only present objects exist. Or, more precisely, that: necessarily, it is always the case that only present objects exist (Markosian, 2004: 47, fn.1). Presentism is often described as the intuitive or 'common sense' view of time (Bigelow, 1996: 35; Sider, 2001: 11; Markosian, 2004: 48; etc.), but it faces two important problems: the 'constituent problem' and the 'truth-maker problem'. Consider a true singular proposition about the past, e.g. <Caesar crossed the Rubicon>.[4] This proposition exists; indeed, it must exist to be true. But presentists struggle to account for the existence and truth of such propositions about the past.

The constituent problem arises because singular propositions are treated as structured entities that depend for their existence on the existence of their constituents. The obvious constituents of singular propositions about the past are past objects. E.g., the obvious constituent of <Caesar crossed the Rubicon> is Caesar. However, presentists deny the existence of past objects, such as Caesar, and thus must either deny the existence of such propositions about the past, or else provide an alternative account of their constituents.[5]

The truth-maker problem arises given the common assumption that truth (substantively) depends upon the world, and the even more common assumption that there are truths about the past. It is tempting to hold that truths are '*made true*' by relevant parts of the world. Given this, the obvious 'truth-makers' for truths about the past are states of affairs involving past objects. E.g., the obvious truth-maker for <Caesar crossed the Rubicon> is a state of affairs involving Caesar. However, presentists deny that such states of affairs exist.

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4   Let '<p>' denote 'the proposition that p'.
5   See Fitch (1994; 1996), King (2007; 2014), and Fitch & Nelson (2014), amongst others, for discussion of the view that singular propositions are structured entities. Fitch (1994) and Markosian (2004) raise the constituent problem as significant for presentism.

Thus, presentists must either deny (implausibly) that propositions about the past can be made true, or else provide an alternative account of their truth-makers.[6]

A simple way to address these problems is to propose some presently existing entities to play the constituent role in singular propositions about the past and to serve as truth-makers for propositions about the past. But not just any entities can do this job. In what follows, I discuss a plausible constraint on what entities count as truth-makers (§2.2), and then suggest that prominent accounts of truth-makers for presentism fail to satisfy this constraint (§2.3).

2.2.   Truth-Makers and Aboutness

Here is Armstrong's (2004) characterisation of the truth-maker problem: 'What truthmaker can be provided for the truth <Caesar existed>? The obvious truthmaker, at least, is Caesar himself. But to allow Caesar as a truthmaker seems to allow reality to the past, contrary to [presentism]' (2004: 146). Presentists who feel the force of this objection seem compelled to locate truth-makers for true propositions about the past. A truth-maker is minimally understood as an entity that stands in a relation of cross-categorial necessitation to a true proposition, such that the existence of the entity necessitates the truth of the proposition (2004: 6). However, there is more to the task of providing truth-makers than proposing entities that merely necessitate the truth: to satisfy any demand for truth-makers the right sort of truth-makers must be provided. For instance, Merricks (2007) argues that the right sorts of truth-makers are entities that the relevant true propositions are about.

An example helps to motivate this 'aboutness' constraint. Consider <snow is white>, a true proposition that requires a truth-maker. Some entities that necessitate the truth of <snow is white> nevertheless are not plausible truth-makers for the proposition. For instance, the state of affairs *that <snow is white> is true* necessitates the truth of <snow is white>. This state of affairs exists at all and only worlds in which <snow is white> is true and so is a candidate truth-maker, since it provides the relevant cross-categorial necessitation. However, this is not a good putative truth-maker for the proposition, since *that <snow is white> is true* seems to be a trivial truth-maker for <snow is white> (Merricks, 2007: 28-34). But what is the relevant difference between the two states of affairs, *that snow is white* and *that <snow is white> is true*? The former is what <snow is white> is about, whereas the latter is not. Hence, truth-makers must be entities that the relevant truths are about.

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[6]   See, Bigelow (1988), Armstrong (2004), Rodriguez-Pereyra (2005), Cameron (2008), and Schaffer (2010), amongst others, for discussion and defence of the view that truth substantively depends upon the world. Sider (2001: 35-42), Keller (2004), and Cameron (2011) all raise the truth-maker problem as significant for presentism. The problem is also stated, more generally, as a problem about truth supervening upon the world (Kierland & Monton, 2007). Since the problem is more commonly stated as a 'truth-maker' problem, this is the problem upon which I focus in this paper. For discussion, see Caplan & Sanson (2011).

Merricks's (2007) demand is neither unreasonable nor idiosyncratic, and presentists who accept the force of the truth-maker problem cannot simply shrug it off. Several truth-maker theorists accept that a proposition must be *about* its truth-maker in much the same way. However, it is not always explicitly stated in the presentation of the theory. For instance, Rodriguez-Pereyra (2005: 21) introduces his theory by stating that: 'it is a relevant portion of reality … that determines the truth of the proposition'. More plainly, Smith (1999: 279) constrains his theory as follows: '[a] truthmaker for a given judgement … must be, of its nature, the right sort of part. It must be part of that which the judgement is about, must satisfy some relevance constraint'. If one accepts the demand for truth-makers, then one should also accept an aboutness constraint.

To solve the truth-maker problem, we must propose presently existing entities as truth-makers for true propositions about the past. The putative truth-makers must necessitate the truth of the propositions and satisfy the aboutness constraint—a truth-maker must be what the truth is about. Extant solutions fail to solve the truth-maker problem in a satisfactory way. None of the putative accounts of truth-makers propose the right sort of truth-makers.[7] For brevity, I do not defend this broad claim here. Instead, I show how one prominent account fails in this way and indicate how the failure generalises.

2.3.   Lucretianism and Aboutness

Bigelow's (1996) 'Lucretianism' is a prominent solution to the truth-maker problem that fails to satisfy the aboutness constraint. Lucretianism proposes that truth-makers for true propositions about the past are states of affairs involving primitive past-tensed properties presently instantiated by the world; for example, the truth-maker for <Caesar existed> is a state of affairs involving the primitive past-tensed property, *having-contained-Caesar*, instantiated by the world. Lucretianism fails to satisfy the aboutness constraint because it seems that truths about the past are not about the world presently instantiating certain past-tensed properties. Indeed, it seems that <Caesar existed> is about Caesar (in some sense) and not about the world (Merricks, 2007: 136-7).

Typically, solutions to the truth-maker problem fall foul of the aboutness constraint for the following general reason. Presentists are compelled to provide present entities as truth-makers. But truths about the past are not obviously about presently existing entities. Hence, presentist solutions must say more to handle this worry. At least, some connection must be drawn between the proposed truth-makers and the propositions about the past, showing how the proposed entities count as the right sort of truth-makers for the relevant propositions.

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[7]   This is a bold claim, but there is little consensus (even amongst presentists) that the problem has been solved. Extant solutions are proposed by: Bigelow (1996), Crisp (2007), Kierland & Monton (2007), Cameron (2011), and McKinnon & Bigelow (2012), inter alia. None of the accounts proposed deal directly with the problem raised by the aboutness constraint. Further, it strikes me that Kierland & Monton's proposal fails for reasons due to Sanson & Caplan (2010: 31, fn.10), and Cameron's proposal fails for reasons due to Tallant & Ingram (2012a; 2012b).

In what follows, I argue that adopting the thisness ontology, sketched in §1, provides presentists with the ontological resources to solve both the constituent problem and truth-maker problems facing presentism. Further, I propose that, crucially, the truth-makers provided for truths about the past are the right sort of truth-makers (i.e. they satisfy the aboutness constraint).

3.   **Thisnesses at Work**

3.1.   The Constituent Problem

Adams (1986) defines a 'singular proposition' as follows: 'a singular proposition about an individual x is a proposition that involves or refers to x directly, perhaps by having x or the thisness of x as a constituent, and not merely by way of x's qualitative properties or relations to other individuals' (1986: 315). Although Adams does not say so, this definition facilitates a ready solution to the constituent problem for presentism. Singular propositions about the past are partly constituted by presently existing thisnesses of past objects. To illustrate, <Caesar crossed the Rubicon> is partly constituted by Caesar's thisness, and thus exists because Caesar's thisness exists. This kind of response is perfectly consistent with the more general view that singular propositions are structured entities of a particular kind.[8]

Singular propositions are structured entities that involve objects or thisnesses as constituents. The involvement of such constituents preserves the idea that the propositions are directly about particular objects. If structured propositions were constituted by purely qualitative properties, then this would not preserve the same intuition about aboutness. Indeed, there is an analogue between disguised definite descriptions and propositions constituted by qualitative properties. Definite descriptions are not directly about objects, and so do not denote the same object in all possible circumstances.

Suppose <Caesar crossed the Rubicon> is a structured proposition partly constituted by Caesar. This propositional constituent determines Caesar, the same actual object, in all possible circumstances just because Caesar himself is involved in the proposition.[9] By contrast, suppose that the same proposition is partly constituted by purely qualitative properties. In this case, the propositional constituent involved in <Caesar

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8   This general strategy also avoids problems, advanced by Merricks (2012; 2015), for the so-called 'received view' of singular propositions, according to which the constituent of a singular proposition about x is x itself. (Discussion of these problems goes beyond the scope of the present paper.) Moreover, something like this strategy (i.e. a thisness approach to propositions) is also presented and defended by Plantinga (1978), who proposes that 'proper names express essences' (1978: 132). My project and Plantinga's do not overlap. However, it is worth noting that there is even more work that a thisness approach to propositions can do beyond the defence of presentism articulated here. —I'm grateful to an anonymous reviewer for highlighting this point.

9   Here and elsewhere the term 'determines' is borrowed from King's (2014) survey on structured propositions. To get clear on what this term implies in this context, consider the following illustrative use from Kaplan (1989): 'Don't think of propositions as sets of possible worlds, but rather as structured entities looking something like the sentences which express them. For each occurrence of a singular term in a sentence there will be a corresponding constituent in the proposition expressed. The constituent of the proposition determines, for each circumstance of evaluation, the object relevant to evaluating the proposition in that circumstance' (1989: 494).

crossed the Rubicon> does not determine Caesar in all possible circumstances. There are possible situations where Caesar comes apart from his qualitative properties and, indeed, where other objects instantiate the very same qualitative properties.

Next, suppose that <Caesar crossed the Rubicon> is partly constituted by Caesar's thisness. Caesar's thisness has (or has had) a direct relationship with Caesar. This is so for all thisnesses of objects. Singular propositions constituted by thisnesses pick out the same actual object in all possible circumstances. If <Caesar crossed the Rubicon> is constituted by Caesar's thisness, then this propositional constituent determines Caesar, the same actual object, in all possible circumstances. This is because Caesar's thisness is (or was) importantly related to Caesar: Caesar's thisness could not exist without the initial existence of Caesar, and the thisness is uniquely instantiated by Caesar throughout his existence. This view of singular propositions also preserves the idea that singular propositions are directly about objects (in a sense).

In sum, singular propositions about the past are partly constituted by thisnesses of past objects. This account is consistent with general views about structured propositions, and with the proposed definition of a singular proposition from Adams (1986). The propositions generated are thus genuine propositions insofar as they are structured entities partly constituted by the thisnesses of relevant objects.

The preceding raises questions about the status of different singular propositions. For instance, contrast a singular proposition about the past with a singular proposition about the present, e.g. <Caesar crossed the Rubicon> and <Obama is President>. Suppose Caesar's thisness constitutes the former, and Obama himself constitutes the latter. This seems to indicate a difference in kind between the propositions. It seems that singular propositions about present objects are privileged (in some sense) in virtue of being partly constituted by the relevant objects. This would be problematic. Suppose I believe propositions about Obama and he goes out of existence. Now, although I have not changed in any important (intrinsic) way, on this anticipated account of propositions there is a real sense in which I have changed: all propositions I believe about Obama suddenly change when he ceases to exist (cf. Markosian, 2004: 49-50). This is an odd result. Presentists should not have to accept that the contents of beliefs change simply because objects cease to exist.

I propose thisnesses constitute *all* singular propositions. Hence, singular propositions about the present are also partly constituted by thisnesses (not present objects). This is consistent with the general view of structured propositions, above, and presents a general and unified account of singular propositions.

Here is an objection. If thisnesses constitute *all* singular propositions, we cannot distinguish propositions about objects from propositions about their thisnesses. For instance, <Caesar crossed the Rubicon> and <Caesar's thisness crossed the Rubicon> seem to have identical constituents. Each proposition is constituted

by Caesar's thisness. This is problematic because we cannot then distinguish propositions about distinct existents at the structural level.

This objection fails because <Caesar's thisness crossed the Rubicon> is not constituted by Caesar's thisness. Every entity has a thisness. Hence, there are thisnesses of thisnesses. And so <Caesar's thisness crossed the Rubicon> is constituted by the thisness of Caesar's thisness, i.e. the particular, primitive, purely non-qualitative property *being-identical-to-Caesar's-thisness*. This means <Caesar crossed the Rubicon> and <Caesar's thisness crossed the Rubicon> are structurally dissimilar. The propositions are distinct in virtue of being partly constituted by distinct thisnesses.

This sort of response may seem unlovely because it suggests a hierarchy of thisnesses. But it is not inconsistent with the general account of propositions assumed. Nor is it prima facie objectionable. One way to illustrate this is via cases involving propositions about propositions. There are propositions about propositions, e.g. <<Grass is green> is true>. But if we allow such propositions, then there is no principled objection to allowing propositions about propositions about propositions, such as <<<Grass is green> is true> is true>, and so on. Once again, this hierarchy is unlovely but not objectionable. The same consideration applies to a hierarchy of thisnesses. If an infinite progression of entities is acceptable in the case of propositions, then a similar progression is acceptable in the case of thisnesses.

Finally let me pre-empt one general concern with this approach to propositions. One might think, if *all* singular propositions are constituted by thisnesses (e.g. <Obama is President> is constituted by Obama's thisness), my view is impossible to express. One might think: to explain what a thisness *is* I must be able to express a proposition with an individual (not a thisness) as a constituent, because I want to say things like "in addition to Obama, there is his thisness." However, or so the concern goes, I cannot do this because when I aim to refer to Obama, I only refer to *his thisness*.

It is at this final step the concern breaks down. In fact, when I aim to refer to Obama, and express a proposition with his thisness as a constituent (e.g. <Obama exists>), I successfully refer to Obama in virtue of the proposition having *his thisness* as a constituent. When I aim to refer to Obama's thisness, and express a proposition with *the thisness of Obama's thisness* (i.e. *being-identical-with-Obama's-thisness*) as a constituent (e.g. <Obama's thisness exists>), I successfully refer to Obama's thisness in virtue of the proposition having *its thisness* as a constituent. This is clear and direct.

3.2.   The Truth-Maker Problem

The thisness ontology also provides a solution to the truth-maker problem: truth-makers for truths about the past are states of affairs involving past-tensed properties instantiated by thisnesses of past objects. The states

of affairs involve presently existing thisnesses of past objects, presently instantiating higher-order past-tensed properties that indirectly characterise the object of the thisness. For example, consider <Caesar crossed the Rubicon>: its truth-maker is a state of affairs involving Caesar's thisness instantiating *having-been-the-thisness-of-a-man-that-crossed-the-Rubicon*. The important addition, for our proposed thisness ontology, is that objects and thisnesses instantiate past-tensed properties, such as *having-crossed-the-Rubicon* or *having-been-the-thisness-of-a-man-that-crossed-the-Rubicon*.

Several extant solutions to the truth-maker problem involve past-tensed properties (e.g. Chisholm, 1990; Bigelow, 1996; Keller, 2004). However, the use of such properties has not proven popular; the main argument against them is that they are metaphysically unrespectable entities, i.e. they are 'dubious' or 'suspicious' properties.[10] I am not convinced by such objections, for reasons adduced by Tallant (2013). And, as Bennett (2011: 190-1) remarks: 'It is not the job of a truthmaking principle to, say, deem irreducible Lucretian properties suspicious … The only real question is whether there are any'. One issue that plausibly settles whether past-tensed properties exist is whether they do any work in a theory. In what follows, I put the properties to work in a solution to the truth-maker problem.

Let me forestall one potential misunderstanding. <Caesar exists> is distinct from <Caesar's thisness exists>. They are about different things and have different constituents. <Caesar exists> and <Caesar's thisness exists> have distinct truth-makers. <Caesar exists> is constituted by Caesar's thisness, so its truth-maker involves *being-identical-with-Caesar* whereas <Caesar's thisness exists> is constituted by the thisness of Caesar's thisness, so its truth-maker involves *being-identical-with-Caesar's-thisness*. To be clear, <Caesar exists> is false since Caesar's thisness does not instantiate *being-a-thisness-of-an-existent*.

Past-Tensed Properties

Thisnesses instantiate higher-order properties that characterise the object of the thisness, and such properties correspond to and depend upon the relevant lower-order properties of the object. As a solution to the truth-maker problem, I propose that objects and thisnesses instantiate past-tensed properties. Hence, an object instantiates first-order past-tensed properties and its thisness instantiates corresponding second-order past-tensed properties. Importantly, the relevant properties of a thisness depend upon the first-order properties of an object (as outlined in §1.3).

A thisness gains past-tensed properties that indirectly characterise the relevant object as a natural part of the relationship between an object and its thisness. However, the story here is more complex than the standard case. Recall: x's thisness *T* instantiates higher-order properties that correspond to the lower-order properties

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[10] See, for instance, Sider (2001: 40-41) and Merricks (2007: 135) for representative objections concerning the apparently objectionable nature of such properties. See Crisp (2007: 94-98) and Cameron (2011: 59-61) for attempts to spell out what exactly is objectionable about such properties.

of x, and the relevant properties of T depend upon x's properties. For example, Obama's thisness instantiates *being-the-thisness-of-a-President* because Obama instantiates the property *being-a-President*. Obama's thisness would not instantiate any such property if Obama failed to instantiate a corresponding first-order property. Obama's thisness gains properties that indirectly characterise Obama, e.g. Obama's thisness instantiates *being-the-thisness-of-a-former-child* just because Obama instantiates *having-been-a-child*, and so on. However, x's thisness T also gains certain past-tensed properties when x ceases to exist. Caesar's thisness instantiates *having-been-the-thisness-of-a-man-that-crossed-the-Rubicon* because Caesar no longer exists. Caesar no longer instantiates *having-crossed-the-Rubicon*, and so Caesar's thisness no longer instantiates *being-the-thisness-of-a-man-that-crossed-the-Rubicon*. This relationship is unsurprising given the framework of past-tensed properties characterising their objects.

Similarly, x's thisness cannot lose past-tensed properties that indirectly characterise x. Quite generally, nothing can lose a past-tensed property unless it goes out of existence (or, indeed, unless the property fails to accurately characterise it), because the past does not change. For example, Caesar's thisness cannot lose *having-been-the-thisness-of-a-man-that-crossed-the-Rubicon*. But, Caesar's thisness can lose other properties, such as *being-the-property-of-a-man-that-crossed-the-Rubicon*. As seems reasonable, x's thisness T cannot change with respect to any of its past-tensed properties unless there is a sense in which a property no longer accurately characterises T. As before, circumstances according to which a property fails to accurately characterise its bearer seem plain. Caesar's thisness loses the relevant past-tensed property because it no longer accurately characterises the thisness. Caesar's thisness is no longer instantiated by Caesar, and so is no longer the property of a man that crossed the Rubicon; but, Caesar's thisness is the former thisness of a man that crossed the Rubicon. (To be clear, Caesar's thisness is no longer the property of a man that crossed the Rubicon, because Caesar's thisness is no longer the property of any man—Caesar has ceased to exist, and Caesar's thisness exists uninstantiated.)

An important upshot of the relationship between object, thisness, and past-tensed properties, is that the thisness solution satisfies an extra desideratum for solutions to the truth-maker problem: the truth-values of truths about the past do not change in an objectionable way. As Cameron states (2011: 76): 'One constraint on any acceptable theory ... is that if it is now true that it was the case that p at some past time t then, for every time t* later than t but before the present, it is now true that it was the case at t* that it was the case at t that p. Whilst not logically inconsistent, it would be bad if it could now be true that ten years ago there was a sea battle, but that five years ago it wasn't true that five years before that there was a sea battle'. The thisness solution satisfies this proposed desideratum because x's thisness T cannot change in an objectionable way with respect to the relevant past-tensed properties that indirectly characterise x. This builds on the thisness ontology suggested by Adams (1986), Keller (2004), and Diekemper (2015).

Thisness Presentism and Lucretianism

The proposed thisness ontology involves past-tensed properties. This naturally invites comparison with Bigelow's (1996) Lucretianism (cf. §2.3). To recap, Lucretianism is the view that truth-makers for true propositions about the past are states of affairs involving the world instantiating past-tensed properties.

Suppose the natures of the tensed properties suggested by Lucretianism and Thisness Presentism are the same. Even so, the views differ in one important respect: Lucretianism uses the world as property-bearer whereas Thisness Presentism uses thisnesses of past objects. This is important because Lucretianism fails to solve the truth-maker problem in virtue of using the entire world as bearer. Lucretianism does not satisfy the aboutness constraint because propositions about the past are not about the world. For instance, <Caesar existed> is not about the world presently instantiating *having-contained-Caesar*.

3.3.   What About Aboutness?

I have proposed that the truth-makers for truths about the past are states of affairs involving past-tensed properties instantiated by thisnesses of past objects. The truth-maker for <Caesar crossed the Rubicon> is the state of affairs involving Caesar's thisness presently instantiating *having-been-the-thisness-of-a-man-that-crossed-the-Rubicon*. But, recall that any satisfactory account of truth-makers must satisfy the aboutness constraint; a proposition must be about its truth-maker, otherwise apparently irrelevant parts of the world can be used as truth-makers. The proposed thisness ontology solves the truth-maker problem because the putative truth-makers satisfy the aboutness constraint. The solution defended here offers a plausible account of how true past-tensed propositions are about thisnesses of past objects, in a relevant sense. In what follows, I explain how thisnesses satisfy the aboutness constraint.

Propositions and Aboutness

Singular propositions are constituted by thisnesses. In particular, singular propositions about past objects, such as <Caesar crossed the Rubicon>, are constituted by presently existing thisnesses of past objects, e.g. Caesar's thisness. Hence, a singular proposition about a past object, x, is about x in virtue of being constituted by x's thisness. Further, this singular proposition about x is also about x's thisness in virtue of being constituted by x's thisness. Here is a plausible sufficient condition: for any proposition P, P is about x if (i) P is partly constituted by x, or (ii) P is partly constituted by x's thisness. So, <Caesar crossed the Rubicon> is about Caesar *and* Caesar's thisness, since it is partly constituted by Caesar's thisness. (On this account, a proposition can be about more than one thing, i.e. an object *and* its thisness.)

How does this account of singular propositions help satisfy the aboutness constraint? The answer should now be clear. A truth about the past is about some past object, x, *and* x's thisness, because the proposition is partly constituted by x's thisness. So, <Caesar crossed the Rubicon> is about Caesar's thisness and <Caesar crossed the Rubicon> is made true by a state of affairs involving Caesar's thisness. This follows from the sufficient condition for aboutness: a proposition is about x if it is partly constituted by x or by x's thisness. Our proposed truth-makers satisfy the aboutness constraint because the truth-maker for <Caesar crossed the Rubicon> involves what the proposition is about: Caesar's thisness.

Here is an objection. There is no intuitive sense of 'about' according to which singular propositions about past objects are *about* thisnesses of past objects. For instance, one might challenge that <Caesar crossed the Rubicon> is about Caesar and nothing else. As such, the apparently plausible sufficient condition for aboutness, stipulated above, fails.

To reply, I concede that <Caesar crossed the Rubicon> is intuitively about Caesar. But, on my picture, the proposition is *also* about Caesar's thisness in virtue of being constituted by it. This follows from the solution to the constituent problem and the (rough) analysis of aboutness, proposed above, i.e. a proposition *P* is about x if: (i) *P* is partly constituted by x, or (ii) *P* is partly constituted by x's thisness. <Caesar crossed the Rubicon> is about Caesar's thisness in virtue of being partly constituted by Caesar's thisness.

Constituency and Aboutness

On my view, if a proposition *P* is constituted by a thisness *T*, then *P* is *about T*. McDaniel (2011) anticipates and rejects something like this move towards analysing 'aboutness' in terms of 'constituency', arguing that it is not clear what is meant by 'about' (quite generally) and considers whether it can be analysed as 'constituency'. To illustrate:

> '[A] proposition is *about* some entity just in case that entity is a constituent of that proposition. This sense of 'about' is familiar from work on so-called singular propositions. Propositions are structured entities consisting of objects and properties. Some expressions are directly referential. A sentence containing a directly referential expression expresses a proposition that contains the referent of that expression as a constituent.' (McDaniel, 2011: 208)

McDaniel suggests that this proposed analysis of aboutness does not work for all true propositions and, as such, this analysis cannot be the basis of a reasonable constraint on truth-maker theory. Consider a true proposition: <Some person exists>. It seems reasonable to assume that a person, Kris, is a suitable truth-maker for the proposition. However, on the constituency analysis, Kris fails to satisfy the aboutness constraint because he is not a constituent of <Some person exists>. Hence, Kris fails to count as a suitable truth-maker

for <Some person exists>. This is a bad result and not what proponents of an aboutness constraint, e.g. Merricks (2007), intend by the notion of aboutness (McDaniel, 2011: 208).

However, McDaniel's (2011) argument does not undermine the proposed *sufficient condition*, that a proposition is about x if it is partly constituted by x or by x's thisness. First, McDaniel shows that 'aboutness' cannot be *analysed* in terms of 'constituency'. But I do not claim to offer an analysis of aboutness. I specify a sense in which a proposition is about an object and its thisness: a proposition is about x and x's thisness *T* in virtue of being partly constituted by *T*. Second, McDaniel assumes that it is *necessary* for a proposition to be constituted by some entity in order to be about that entity, but I think that it is merely *sufficient*. (This should be obvious since I claim that <Caesar crossed the Rubicon> is also about Caesar, even though it is not constituted by Caesar.)

There is an intuitive sense of 'aboutness' that is captured by examples but also resists analysis. This is, for instance, Merricks's (2007; 2008; 2011) stock reply on the issue, and Merricks is the leading proponent of an aboutness constraint on truth-maker theory. I propose that all true propositions about the past are also about thisnesses of past objects (because propositions are partly constituted by thisnesses). So, if a proposition is constituted by a thisness, then the proposition is about an object and that thisness.

An aside: McDaniel (2011: 208) refers to the sense of 'about' familiar from the literature on singular propositions. Given my focus on structured singular propositions (cf. §3.1), there is an interesting general issue in the vicinity regarding whether a complete analysis of this sort of aboutness in terms of propositional constituency is plausible. That is, whether we can fully analyse what a proposition is about in terms of what constitutes that proposition.[11] However, this issue is orthogonal to my primary concern here, which is the aboutness constraint on truth-maker theory. I specify a sense in which a proposition is about an object and its thisness, but this is not a putative analysis.

A Restated Aboutness Worry

Here is one final objection. Consider the following apparent truism: "truths about the way that non-abstract objects were should depend upon the way that non-abstract object were." I state that truths about non-abstract past objects, e.g. Caesar, depend upon the way that Caesar's thisness is now. This view seems to contradict the apparent truism.

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[11] Salmon (2007), for instance, develops an analysis of aboutness in terms of propositional constituency in a broadly Russellian spirit, wherein a proposition *P* is about an object x iff x is a proper constituent of *P*. I deny that *P* is about x *only if* x constitutes *P*. I think that *P* is about x if x's thisness constitutes *P* and this is a sense perfectly consistent with the aboutness constraint. For some criticism of Salmon's (2007) notion of aboutness, see Armstrong & Stanley (2011: 220-1).—I'm grateful to an anonymous reviewer for highlighting this point.

I disagree. I do not think the view contradicts the truism. Truths about the way that non-abstract objects were do depend upon the way that non-abstract objects were. Rather, a thisness has a certain character *in virtue of* the relevant object that instantiates it. For instance, x's thisness T could not instantiate higher-order properties that indirectly characterise x, without x instantiating (at some time) the relevant lower-order properties. Also, T depends on x for its very existence and for the way it is now. Hence, truths about the way that non-abstract objects were depend upon the way that non-abstract object were. The way that x's thisness T is now depends upon the way that x was and truths about the way that x was depend upon the way that x's thisness T is now. Thus, the way the abstract object was is not of any direct concern. What matters is how the non-abstract object was.

4.   Haecceitist Presentism

Using a thisness ontology to defend presentism is an underdeveloped and under-defended approach in the literature. Keller's (2004) 'Haecceitist Presentism', is an important precursor to the view articulated here. Keller offers Haecceitist Presentism as a putative solution to the truth-maker problem, although it is not clear whether he endorses the view. In this paper, I have proposed Thisness Presentism (which can be understood as a development of Haecceitist Presentism) as a solution to the constituent problem, and as a solution to the truth-maker problem that satisfies the aboutness constraint. But Thisness Presentism and Haecceitist Presentism differ in various respects, as I shall now discuss.

First, Keller (2004: 101-2) suggests that there is work to be done to make Haecceitist Presentism palatable. But Keller does not do this work, nor does Keller ultimately appear to endorse the view outlined. I go some way towards developing Thisness Presentism as a palatable view and show that it can do more than solve the truth-maker problem. Second, Keller (2004) develops a novel account of the properties instantiated by his haecceities (i.e. 'thisnesses'). My account of thisnesses and properties is more sensible and less revisionary. To introduce Keller's account of properties, I quote him at length:

> '[The] entities that underlie the truth of *Anne was sophisticated* cannot just be Anne's haecceity and the property of sophisticatedness. Rather, the presentist says there exists the property of sophisticatedness—a property that can be instantiated by present persons—and there also exists a different property—call it sophisticatedness*—that can be instantiated by thisnesses. Sophisticatedness* is of such a nature that, if it is instantiated by the haecceity of some individual, then it is true that, when that haecceity was or will be itself instantiated, the mentioned individual was or will be sophisticated. Anne's thisness is sophisticated*, and that's enough to make it true that Anne, when she existed, was sophisticated.' (Keller, 2004: 97)

To be clear, the proposed truth-maker for <Anne was sophisticated> is Anne's thisness presently instantiating the property of *sophisticatedness**. This is distinct from my proposed truth-maker, which is that Anne's thisness presently instantiates the property *having-been-the-thisness-of-a-sophisticated-person*. Thisness Presentism does not require a distinct sui generis category of properties (or 'properties*') to be instantiated by thisnesses. Instead,

it builds on the view that properties are inherently tensed and uses such past-tensed properties, which can be instantiated by all entities, as part of the truth-maker account.

One might complain that this is an infelicitous interpretation of Haecceitist Presentism and that the properties* of Anne's thisness are not so described. For instance, one might contend that properties* are not sui generis properties at all; properties* are the ordinary higher-order properties described as part of Thisness Presentism. But then this version of Haecceitist Presentism just is my view. I will concede that if one interprets properties* in this way, then Haecceitist Presentism and Thisness Presentism are not vastly distinct views. But it is not clear from Keller's (2004) presentation that this is an accurate characterisation of properties*. The nature of Keller's properties* is not clear, and I have difficulty understanding what these higher-order properties could be if not either (i) a class of sui generis higher-order properties instantiated by thisnesses, or (ii) ordinary higher-order properties, instantiated by thisnesses, that indirectly characterise the individual that instantiates the relevant thisness.

Finally, Thisness Presentism improves upon Haecceitist Presentism insofar as my view is able to respond to recent criticisms of Keller's approach. Consider the following concerns raised by Mozersky (2011):

> '[Haecceitist Presentism] is troubling for at least two reasons. First, it seems simple to understand what it is to refer to or talk about a person. If, however, I am told that when discussing Anne Boleyn I am really discussing a [thisness], I am left feeling quite mystified; this simply does not seem to be what I am discussing. Second, … If the referent of 'Anne Boleyn' is an abstract property and this property, and other abstracta, can make 'Anne Boleyn existed in 1536' true, then what need have we to suppose that a concrete Anne ever existed? The view is consistent with her never having existed concretely.' (Mozersky, 2011: 136)

Mozersky may be rightly concerned that Keller's view does not address these two issues, but Thisness Presentism has an answer on both counts. First, when discussing Anne Boleyn, perhaps uttering a sentence that expresses <Anne Boleyn existed in 1536>, one refers to Anne Boleyn in virtue of expressing a proposition which has her thisness (*being-identical-with-Anne-Boleyn*) as a constituent. It is simply not the case that one is in fact discussing Anne's thisness instead of Anne herself. Second, although an abstract property, Anne's thisness (*not* Anne herself), is the truth-maker for true propositions about Anne, it is not the case that Thisness Presentism is consistent with Anne having never existed. Anne's thisness could not exist without the initial existence of Anne; Anne's thisness non-rigidly ontologically depends upon Anne. Moreover, Anne's thisness doesn't continue to depend on Anne for its existence, the relation obtains for an instant, and Anne and her thisness come into being simultaneously.

This strikes me as sufficient for showing how Thisness Presentism develops upon Keller's view (in addition to other ways discussed in the paper). However, it is useful to reiterate one final point about the scope of my proposal. Keller suggests that Haecceitist Presentism can be used to solve the truth-maker problem. I argue

that a thisness ontology can be used to solve the constituent and truth-maker problems, and I propose (given the putative account of propositions) that the proposed truth-makers satisfy an aboutness constraint. Thisness Presentism is a more developed and better-defended view and presentists should accept it because of the associated benefits.[12]

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