

19

PRESENTISM AND TEMPORAL EXPERIENCE

Akiko Frischhut

Introduction

When thinking about time, we can distinguish two subjects: the nature of time and our experience of time. A theory of time should be able to accommodate the way we experience temporality. A viable account of temporal consciousness should be compatible with our best theory of time. This chapter investigates how presentism accounts for our experience of time. According to presentism, all and only present things exist.¹ Presentists argue that their view is the most intuitive, capturing best what most people (pre-philosophically) think about time: you and I exist, but the Roman Empire does not exist anymore, whereas the Olympic Games 2020 do not exist yet.² Time passes: what is future will be present, what is present will be past and what is past was once present. Presentists not only claim to capture what most people think about time but also how we experience time. In particular, they claim that we all experience time as passing and that this is best explained by the fact that time really does pass.³ This gives presentism an intuitive advantage over other theories of time. Or so presentists say.

This might puzzle some. After all, change is the having of incompatible properties at different times, but since presentism only ever allows one time, the present time, one might wonder if and how presentists can account for change and change experiences. I will concentrate on the latter and focus on two *central questions*:

- CQ1: Can presentism, given theory X of temporal perception, account for experiences of change and duration?
- CQ2: Can presentism, given theory X of temporal perception, account for experiences of time as passing?

Before we consider these questions, however, we will have to look at a more general problem that arises for presentism and perceptual experience in the first section. Since we only ever perceive what is already past, presentists owe us an explanation of how to make sense of perceptual experience at all. Whether they succeed depends on the theory of perception adopted. From there, I will move on to temporal perception, providing a very brief overview of the debate on temporal perception in the next section. Thereafter, I aim to answer the central questions. Three accounts will be considered: anti-realism, retentionalism and extensionalism. Regarding CQ1,

I argue that the combination of presentism, an indirect theory of perception and retentionism, is most likely able to account for experiences of change, depending on a viable presentist account of causal relations. As for CQ2, it turns out that none of the combinations considered can accommodate experiences of temporal passage in the sense relevant for presentists. The last section concludes with a short summary of the results of my investigation.

Presentism and the time-lag argument

Before starting with the problems that arise for presentism in the context of temporal experience, we need to address a concern about presentism and perceptual experience in general. Of course, if the problem proves serious, it affects all cases of experience, synchronic and diachronic. The problem is the time-lag argument against direct realism. Direct realism is the thesis that we can be directly aware of mind-independent physical objects, where a subject *S* is directly aware of some object *o* if *S* is aware of *o*, yet not aware of *o* by virtue of being aware of something else.⁴ For the presentists among the direct realists, this argument proves serious. It shows that the combination of the two views is untenable or, at the very least, highly counter-intuitive.

The time lag in experience, in particular visual experience, refers to the fact that the visual information we get from the environment is delayed because of the time it takes for light to travel from the (external) object of experience to the visual system of the perceiving subject. The structure of the time-lag argument is simple:⁵

- 1 We experience stars that do not exist anymore.
- 2 When it *seems* to us that we are directly aware of something, then there must *be* something we are directly aware of.
- 3 We cannot be directly aware of something that does not exist anymore.
- 4 Therefore, when we see a star that does not exist anymore, what we are directly aware of cannot be the star itself.
- 5 Since perception *always* involves a time lag, the direct objects of experience can *never* be external objects.⁶

For those direct realists who are also presentists, the time-lag argument is a serious reason for concern. A common response for direct realists is to bite the bullet. Sometimes we have direct veridical experiences of past objects, even if they do not exist anymore. Thus Ayer, for example, asks:

Why should it not be admitted that our eyes can range into the past, if all that is meant by this is that the time at which we see things may be later than the time when they are in the states in which we see them? And having admitted this, why then should we not also admit it is possible to see things which no longer exist?

*(Ayer 1982: 94–95)*⁷

This sounds like a perfectly sensible response. All the worse for presentist direct realists, since it is not available to them. The problem is that “exists” could be either understood as “local existence” or as “existence *simpliciter*”.⁸ In the local sense, to say that a star ceased to exist ten years ago, say, just means that it is located ten years and more prior to our time. In contrast, if it has ceased to exist *simpliciter*, then it has ceased to be part of reality. For presentists, wholly non-present things do not exist in the same sense as Sherlock Holmes does not exist: they are not part of reality. Seeing some *x* requires one to stand in a relation to *x*. As it is commonly agreed that non-existing things cannot instantiate relations, presentists, it seems, have to reject direct realism about temporal perception.⁹

Since the time-lag problem for presentists is but one instance of the much wider problem concerning presentism and cross-temporal relations, presentist direct realists might be able to help themselves to some of the presentist strategies developed to cope with cross-temporal relations in general. They could, for example, deny that relations are existence entailing. Most people would hesitate to do so, for good reasons.¹⁰

Other alternatives include adopting Hinchcliff's (1996) "unrestricted presentism", according to which non-present things can instantiate properties and relations. Most presentists are unwilling to accept this, since this sort of Meinongianism about the past only undermines their claim to intuitiveness.¹¹

Brogaard (2006) argues for tensed as opposed to tenseless relations, where the former need not be existence entailing. One way to understand this is in terms of presently instantiated, irreducibly tensed, primitive relational properties, as in *having been caused by x*, instantiated by the perception. This seems undesirable since it cuts the explanatory tie between object of perception and perception. My having a particular perception is no longer explained by the external object perceived, but by the fact that my perception instantiates some relational property.¹²

Markosian's (2004) and Sider's (1999) strategy consists in admitting that truths involving cross-temporal relations are not *literally* true. Instead, there are sufficiently similar truths "in the ball park" (Markosian) or "quasi-truths" (Sider) which justify us treating the relevant claims as true. Since direct realists think that perceptual experience can give us immediate and straightforward access to the objects of experience, such solutions do not seem compatible.

But even if a viable solution to the problem of cross-temporal relations can be found, presentist direct realists face another, even more serious problem. Direct realists conceive of veridical experiences as partly constituted by their object(s).¹³ Due to the time lag, any object we are perceptually aware of is past when perceived.¹⁴ Thus for the presentist direct realist, veridical experiences themselves must be partly constituted by something that does not exist anymore. If objects of experience are constitutive of experiences, then they must be essentially so, since the idea of a veridical experience (in the direct realist sense) without an object as proper part makes no sense. The result is that presentism, combined with direct realism, renders veridical perceptual experience impossible, independently of how successful the problem of cross-temporal relations can be solved.

Presentists, it seems, have no choice but to reject direct realism. How does the view fare with other theories of perception? According to the sense-data theory of perception, what we are directly aware of in experience is not some past external object but some present internal object that merely mediates the past. Alternatively, representationalists hold that when we perceive some external object like the star, the star causes us (in the right way) to be in a certain representational state which allows us to be aware of it. In both cases, the external object is not constitutive of the perception itself. But in both cases, a veridical perceptual experience requires a causal relation obtaining between a present thing (the sense-datum, the mental state) and something past (the object of experience). Since relations are existence entailing, and past things do not exist for presentists, not much, it seems, has been gained by moving from direct to indirect realism.

One important difference, however, is that presentism + direct realism cannot account for (veridical) perceptual experiences *at all*, whereas presentism + an indirect theory of perception cannot account for the *origin* of these experiences. This is because the objects of experience are constitutive of veridical experiences for direct realists, while they are only their causes on the opponent views. Of course, presentists who choose an indirect theory of perception still need to say something about the causal relations involved.

Presentists have developed various well-known strategies to account for causal relations. One is to treat presentist causation in the way Lewis (2004) treats absence causation, by giving

a counterfactual account of causal dependence.¹⁵ Various authors have pointed out though that such an account still requires some genuine relation to supervene on.¹⁶

Bigelow (1996) and McDaniel (2009) have suggested that presentists invoke relations between “Lucretian properties”, i.e. presently instantiated tensed properties as causal relations. The hope is that relations between tensed properties are sufficiently similar to the kind of relation that would satisfy our concept of causation. One might think that instantiations of tensed properties are themselves caused by prior events though, which leads to worries about a threatening infinite regress, involving infinitely many tensed properties to account for each causal relation.¹⁷

This is by no means exhaustive, and discussing the proposals in detail would bring us too far off focus. What is important is that presentist indirect realist theories of perceptual experience stand and fall with the presentist treatment of causal relations. In so far as the challenge for presentists posed by the time lag in perceptual experience is just a variation of the challenge posed by cross-temporal relations in general, it is not new.

To summarize, whereas presentism and direct realism seem incompatible, the viability of presentism and indirect theories of temporal perception depends on more general problems presentism has with causal relations. Since this chapter focuses on a different problem, we will simply note here that the latter views are at least less obviously troubled by the time lag problem than the former. Keeping this in mind, we can move on to temporal experience. Before turning to our central questions, I will briefly introduce the debate about temporal perception in the following section.

The paradox of temporal awareness

Leaving the metaphysics of time aside, let us concentrate on our experience only for a moment. The debate about temporal perception can be characterized by what Dainton (2000) has called the “paradox of temporal awareness”. It can be outlined in three plausible, though incompatible claims:

- (A1) We seem to experience change and duration just as we experience colours and shapes.
- (A2) In perceptual experience, all we seem to be aware of is what is (was) momentarily present.
- (A3) We can only be aware of change as occurring over time.

Of the three claims, (A3) is the safest to hold. Even if some or all changes were instantaneous, we must experience change as occurring over time, for otherwise to experience change would mean to experience an object being F and not F at the same time.¹⁸ This leaves temporal perception theorists with (A1) and (A2): either they abandon the idea that we can experience change or they deny that our experience is bound to what occurs at an instant.

Of course, no one doubts that we are in *some* way aware of change. The dispute is whether one can *strictly speaking* experience change, i.e. be aware of change solely by virtue of one’s current perceptual experience, rather than to infer that change has occurred from a combination of memory (or imagination or judgment) and experience.¹⁹

The consensus appears to be that in order to maintain (A1), we have to abandon (A2). Most people agree that in order to experience change as change, we have to be, in some way or other, aware of more than what occurs at a moment. The big question is whether we should maintain (A1) at this price and, if so, how we are aware of things that do not presently occur. Consequently, the first major divide in the debate is between those who reject (A1) and those who reject (A2).²⁰ Following Dainton, I shall call the former “anti-realists about temporal perception”, and the latter “realists about temporal perception”.²¹

Next, I will briefly present three prominent views of temporal perception. The goal, in each case, is not to evaluate the theory but to evaluate how each fares with regard to presentism and our two central questions.

Anti-realism about temporal perception and presentism

Anti-realists about temporal perception think that if change were experienced, it would have to be experienced as taking time (A3), but that our perceptual awareness is confined to what happens at a time (A2). Consequently, they deny (A1), i.e. deny that we can *strictly speaking* experience change. Let us consider anti-realism with regards to our two central questions:

- CQ1: Can presentism, given anti-realism, account for experiences of change and duration?
- CQ2: Can presentism, given anti-realism, account for experiences of time as passing?

On the face of it, anti-realism matches well with the presentist doctrine. Experiencing change requires a perceptual awareness of something past as past, for example of *the chameleon having been yellow*, which is precisely what the anti-realist and the presentist deny is possible. However, due to the time lag in experience, it also requires an awareness of something past as present, for example of *the chameleon currently being green*. This is acceptable for anti-realists but problematic for presentists. In so far as presentism and direct realism are incompatible, so is their combination with anti-realism. Coupled with an indirect theory, the core problem is not related to temporal perception but to the previously discussed problem presentists have with the time lag in perceptual experience. Presentism + an indirect theory of perception + anti-realism (PIA) simply inherits the same problems.

With regards to CQ2, PIA is more problematic. According to its adherents, presentism best captures the way we experience time. Coupled with anti-realism about perception, however, this advantage is lost. The thought is as follows. It is almost universally accepted, by presentists and non-presentists alike, that we experience time as passing.²² Consider these representative quotes:

Let me begin this inquiry with the simple but fundamental fact that the flow of time, or passage, as it is known, is given in experience, that it is as indubitable an aspect of our perception of the world as the sights and sounds that come in upon us.

(Schuster 1986: 695)

Above and beyond and before all these considerations, of course, is the manifest fact that the world is given to us as changing, and time as passing.

(Maudlin 2007: 135)

Presentism can account for these experiences in a straightforward way: we experience time as passing because time does objectively, i.e. mind-independently pass.²³ The argument that presentists are implicitly relying on here can be summarized with what I call, following Le Poidevin (2007), the Argument from Experience (AFE)²⁴:

- 1 We all experience time as passing.
- 2 The best explanation for these experiences is that time objectively passes.
- 3 Therefore time passes.

Anti-realism is incompatible with 1. Since temporal passage is a form of change (the change from future to present to past), and anti-realism is incompatible with experiences of change in general, anti-realism is likewise incompatible with experiences of temporal passage. Thus, if anti-realism about temporal perception is true, then we cannot have experiences of temporal passage, at least not in the sense relevant for presentists.

The relevant sense here is to experience temporal passage *in the strict sense*. Why is that? In order for AFE to go through, our experience needs to be *best explained* by the fact that time passes. Only perceptual experiences are best explained by what they are experiences of. (Non-hallucinatory) perceptual experiences are caused by their objects, and it is an essential function of perceptual experience to give the subject an accurate account of what the world is like. If we simply inferred, believed or imagined that time passes, if our experience was somehow altered by other cognitive states, or if we were just “hard wired” to think that time passes, then these “experiences” in the broad sense would not justify us inferring that time passes. Rather than being best explained by the fact that time passes, these experiences would be just as well or better explained by facts about ourselves – the way we think or the way our brains work, for example. Given anti-realism, we cannot have experience of time as passing in the required, strict sense.

While PIA does not create any new problems, it also undermines presentism by depriving it of its intuitive advantage. Since many would consider this as a (or the) major motivation for the view, presentists should better not be anti-realists.²⁵

Presentism and retentionalism

Retentionalism is one of two realist theories of temporal perception I shall discuss. Realists deny (A2): that experience is bound to a durationless instant. We can experience what occurs over short intervals and we experience what happens during these intervals *as present*. Since James (1890), such intervals are referred to as “specious presents”.²⁶ Retentionalism is the view that to experience change, we need to be aware of all parts of the temporally extended structure together, at the present moment. According to the retentionalist, we are *at any instant* aware of what occurs *over an interval* of time.

Let us start with CQ1: Can presentism, given retentionalism, account for experiences of change? Since temporally extended events are experienced at the present moment, the combination of the two theories poses no new problems, i.e. no problems other than those presentism has due to the time lag in experience anyway. So much is true at least for presentism + an indirect theory of perception + retentionalism (PIR).

In contrast, PDR (presentism + direct realism + retentionalism) is not tenable. Direct realists conceive of veridical experiences as partly constituted by their object(s). Ignoring the time lag, an experience of change, as a temporally extended phenomenon, must be an experience of something that is at least partially past. So an experience of change would, even without a time lag, be an experience that is partly constituted by something that does not exist. Since only the present temporal part of change exists, only that part could be constitutive of the experience. But an experience of only the present part of change is indistinguishable from an experience of no change at all. In other words, even if there were no time lag in experience, PDR could not account for experiences of change.

Let us now move on to CQ2: Can presentism, given retentionalism, account for experiences of time as passing? Remember that for presentists, a *relevant* experience of temporal passage is one which is *best explained* by the fact that time passes. If the experience is better or equally well explained by a fact which is compatible with time not passing, then we could not infer from it that time actually passes. What would be the content of such an experience? Can retentionalism

accommodate it? Once we have determined the answer to the first question, we will see that the answer to the second must be negative.

Consider some object o that changes from being F at t_1 to G at t_2 . Now, if time passes (in the way presentists conceive of it), then o 's change is "dynamic" in that it is constituted by temporal passage: o changes from F to G , by virtue of the fact that the state of affairs ($F(o)$ at t_1) ceases to exist and ($G(o)$ at t_2) comes into existence. In contrast, if time does not pass, then o is *always* F at t_1 and *always* G at t_2 . Let us call the former change A-change, and the latter B-change. A-change is *brought about* by temporal passage, whereas B-change is qualitative variation over time and does not require time to pass. A relevant experience, in the sense specified, would be an experience of A-change *as* A-change, that is, *as opposed to* as B-change. Since A- and B-change both involve variation over time, we could not infer from an experience of mere variation over time that time passes. For that, a subject would have to experience change as change in what exists rather than as variation over time.

If PIR (presentism + an indirect theory of perception + retentionalism) is correct, then our experience is silent on whether time passes or not. Put in terms of visual experience, PIR cannot account for experiences of A-change *as* A-change, because all changes would look like B-change. Let me explain.

Recall the distinction between "local existence", hence "existence_L", and "existence *simpliciter*", hence "existence_S". To say that some object o has come into existence_L (or ceased to exist_L) is to say that o is not located at any time prior to (or after) the time of reference, whereas to say that o has come into existence_S (or ceased to exist_S), is to say that o has become (or ceased to be) part of reality. Note that an object might exist_S after it has ceased to exist_L, or before it came into existence_L. On the other hand, an object that does not exist_S, cannot exist_L. A-change involves a change in what exists_S, whereas B-change only involves a change in what exists_L.

There is no problem in representing B-change in experience, since there is no problem in representing that $F(o)$ is *located* at t_1 but not after, and that $G(o)$ is *located* at t_2 but not before. In contrast, A-change involves a change in what is real. The problem with representing A-change is that, what A-change is, and how we are supposed to experience change according to retentionalism, is not compatible. To have an experience of change, retentionalism requires us to represent an interval, whereas A-change is an ontological change from one time to the other. On the one hand, we are supposed to perceptually represent things as coming into and going out of existence *simpliciter*. On the other, we are supposed to perceptually represent the interval over which the change occurs. If time passes, then intervals do not exist, for it is precisely the *replacement* of one present time with the next that constitutes temporal passage. So how could *that* be represented by representing an interval? Retentionalism explains the perceptual experience of change in a manner very much akin to experiences of spatial variation: as instantaneous perceptual representations of qualitatively heterogeneous extensions (of time or of space). Such a heterogeneous "spread" is in itself static. It is not surprising that retentionalists cannot represent a dynamic change by representing a static spread.

One way PIR adherents might respond is by introducing phenomenal A-properties. On this proposal, a subject S represents o **as** G now and F (a moment ago). For illustration, consider Figure 19.1 below.

The problem with this suggestion is that such an experience could be accurate if time passed, but also if time did not pass. The difference lies only in the veridicality conditions: if time is static, then the experience is veridical if $G(o)$ obtains (more or less) simultaneous with my experience and $F(o)$ obtains at an earlier time. If time passes, the experience is veridical if $G(o)$ exist_S and $F(o)$ has ceased to exist_S.²⁷ In other words, the difference between A-change and B-change is not reflected by experiences that feature A-properties in the perceptual content.

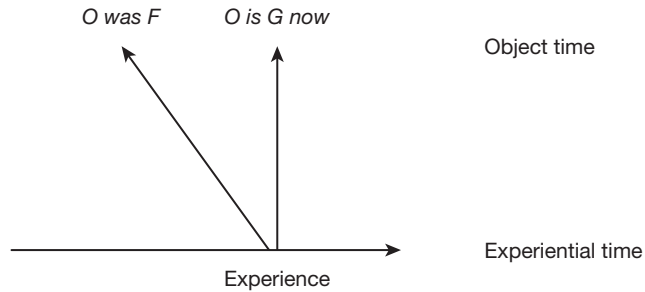


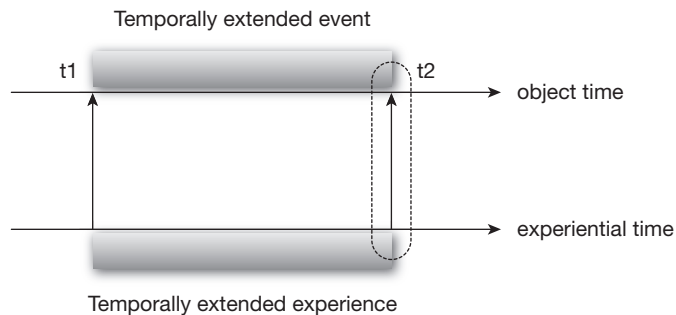
Figure 19.1 Subject *S* represents *o* as *is G now* and *was F* (a moment ago)

Presentism and extensionalism

Just like retentionalism, our second realist theory, extensionalism, holds that we can, strictly speaking, experience change.²⁸ Consider two successive tones, *Do* and *Re*. Extensionalism holds that one can experience the succession of (*Do-Re*) on the basis of one's current perceptual experience alone. Contrary to retentionalism, extensionalists argue that the experience is concurrent with what is experienced: if the succession (*Do-Re*) seems to last two seconds, then the experiential act will also take two seconds.²⁹ During this short period we are perceptually aware of (*Do-Re*) – both tones seem (phenomenally) present to us, although as occurring in succession.³⁰


Presentism + extensionalism (PEX) is incoherent, on both versions, direct and indirect. If presentism is true, then only what is present exists. But if reality is confined to a moment, then our perceptual experiences (the experiential acts) cannot extend through time. Note that retentional theories do not have this problem: since they hold that our experiences of change take no time, they are, at least in this sense, perfectly compatible with presentism.

This requires some clarification. Although presentists standardly think that (concrete) objects exist wholly in the present, few would insist that events exist entirely in the present. Traditionally, presentists reject quantification over events (cf. Prior 1968). There is no event that is my experience of *x*, only a process of experiencing *x*. I am experiencing a temporally extended *x* by having experienced *x* and currently experiencing *x* (and, perhaps, going to experience *x*).³¹ But given that the experiential act is concurrent with what is experienced, and my present experiencing is all that ever exists, we can only ever experience what happens now. An



t2 is present. The perforated oval marks the (only existing), instantaneous present time slice.

Figure 19.2 Change as occurring over time (A3); presentism and extensionalism are incompatible

experiencing that is no more can no more represent something than a pillar that does not exist anymore can carry a bridge.³² Since we can only be aware of change as occurring over time (A3), presentism and extensionalism are incompatible. See Figure 19.2 for illustration: 

Motivated presentists might consider a non-standard form of presentism according to which the objective present has a short non-zero duration, long enough to house an experience which is itself temporally extended but wholly present.³³ Ultimately, this proves a dead-end. *Prima facie*, a problem with any durational present account is that it seems to undermine the way presentists understand tenseless relations of temporal order. A-theorists define B-relations like *earlier than* and *later than* in terms of A-relations such as *n time units past/future*, and it is not obvious how this explanatory priority can be maintained during the extended present.³⁴ Then it is difficult to see how one might coherently spell out a temporally extended objective present during which change occurs. It seems that the temporal parts of any change must be successive, and yet, by virtue of being all present, simultaneous.³⁵ Others worry how to avoid an infinitely long durational present and thus a collapse of presentism into the tenseless theory of time.³⁶ The view is even less plausible when we consider that the duration of the objective present would have to *exactly match* the duration of the temporally extended experience. If the present was longer, then it would be a mystery why the specious present and the concurrent experiential act would not match the duration of the objective present; if it was shorter, then it would be too short to accommodate a temporally extended experience.³⁷

Finally, even if we ignored all these difficulties, non-standard-PEX could not accommodate experiences of temporal passage. Consider again object *o* changing between t_1 and t_2 from *F* to *G*: on a presentist account this is analysed as *F(o)* at t_1 ceasing to exist_s and *G(o)* at t_2 coming into existence_s, independent of whether or not t_1 and t_2 are (each) temporally extended or not. Now suppose t_1 is an interval, I_1 , constituted by temporal parts tp_1 and tp_2 . And suppose, given presentism, I_1 is present, so only I_1 exists. Then *o*'s change *during* I_1 could not be analysed in terms of A-change, since time does not pass during the interval that is the present. Instead, during I_1 , *o* changes by being *F* at tp_1 and *G* at tp_2 . Thus, any change that occurs *over* time (i.e. over two distinct times) would be analysed as A-change, but any change that occurs *during* a time (the interval that is present) would have to be analysed as B-change, as mere qualitative variation over temporal parts of the present time. Since, according to PEX, any change that is experienced has to occur and be experienced during the present time (since only what is present exists and the experience must be concurrent with its object), we could never experience the change that constitutes passage, which is a change *from one present time to the other*, rather than a change that occurs *during* a present time. Thus, even on non-standard-PEX, it would be impossible to experiencing time as passing.

Conclusion

Intuitively, we all believe that we experience change and the passage of time. Presentism prides itself as the most intuitive theory of time. However, a closer look at how we would experience temporality if presentism were true reveals that this is far from obvious. For if presentism were really so intuitive, then it would do justice to these intuitions. In the course of this chapter, I have examined how presentism fares when combined with various leading theories of perception and temporal perception. I focused on two central questions. CQ1: Can presentism, given theory X, account for experiences of change and duration? And CQ2: Can presentism, given theory X, account for experiences of time as passing? The results of my inquiry are set out in Table 19.1 below.

Table 19.1 Results of inquiry




Presentism	Direct realism	Anti-realism	CQ1 NO
	NC	Retentionalism	CQ2 NO CQ1 NO (even without time-lag)
		Extensionalism	CQ2 NO CQ1 NO (even without time-lag)
		Indirect theories of perception	Anti-realism
	DSCR	Retentionalism	CQ2 NO CQ1 DSCR
		Extensionalism	CQ2 NO CQ1 NO (even without time-lag)
		Extensionalism + extended present-presentism	CQ2 NO CQ1 DSEP
			CQ2 NO

Notes: **NC** = not compatible; **DSCR** = depends on solution to the presentist problem with cross-temporal relations; **DSEP** = depends on solution(s) to problems related to the temporally extended objective present.

As Table 19.1 illustrates, there is no possible combination which allows for an experience of time as passing. This result alone undermines the alleged intuitive advantage of presentism and with it the motivation for the view. As for CQ1, presentism and direct realism are incompatible due to the time lag in perception and the fact that direct realism conceives of experiences as partly constituted by its objects.³⁸ Consequently, any combination of presentism + direct realism + temporal perception theory fails too. Moreover, this would even be the case if there were no time lag in perception. Whether presentism is compatible with indirect theories of perception depends on the presentist's solution for the problem of cross-temporal relations. The very same problem is inherited by combinations of presentism + an indirect theory + anti-realism, and by presentism + an indirect theory + retentionalism. Neither of these combinations adds any more or unique problems. Presentism + an indirect theory/direct realism + extensionalism is not viable, even if there were no time lag. Finally, whether a non-standard presentism featuring a temporally extended objective present is compatible with extensionalism depends on whether presentists can overcome problems that come with the extended present. Presentism, it remains safe to say, is not as intuitive a theory as its adherents like to portray it.³⁹

Notes

- 1 Presentism has been expressed differently. A-theoretic presentism holds that things which exist instantiate an irreducible property of presentness (cf. Bigelow 1996; Hinchliff 1996; Markosian 2004). For tense realists to be present *just is* to exist (cf. Tallant 2010), to be the case (cf. Prior 1968), to be actual (cf. Bigelow 1991) or to belong to a set of propositions that is true (Crisp 2005). I will formulate the discussion A-theoretically and assume a substantialist framework. Nothing here hangs on these choices though.
- 2 That presentism is the most intuitive view of time has been claimed, amongst others, by Bigelow (1996: 35), Markosian (2004: 49) and Merricks (2007: 140).
- 3 Although few have explicitly argued for that view, many take it as an intuitive start. See Schuster 1986, Williams 1951 and Maudlin 2007 among others.

- 4 It is enough for my purposes if this is a necessary condition.
- 5 The structure of the argument roughly follows Rashbrook–Cooper’s version. For a detailed analysis see Rashbrook–Cooper (ms).
- 6 I will sometimes omit “perceptual” when I refer to perceptual experience. I will specify whenever I refer to experiences that are not perceptual.
- 7 This is also noted by Rashbrook–Cooper (ms) and Power (2013).
- 8 See also Lowe (2006: 284).
- 9 See also Power (2013) for an argument along these lines.
- 10 For a detailed discussion of problems with this strategy see for example Keller (2004).
- 11 See, for example, Baron (2013), Brogaard (2006: 195) and Markosian (2004: 52).
- 12 A similar problem has been pointed out by Kaplan and Sanson (2011) about presently instantiated past-tensed properties as truthmakers for past-tensed propositions.
- 13 The disjunctivists among the direct realists hold that all perceptual experience is factive. Whether this holds for all direct realists need not concern us here.
- 14 More precisely, any state of an object instantiating some property is past when perceived.
- 15 For an attempt to apply Lewis’s account to the presentist’s problem with causal relations, see McDaniel (2009), and for discussion, see Baron (2012).
- 16 See McDaniel (2009) and Baron (2012)
- 17 See Baron (2012). Baron himself accounts for causal relations by introducing an extended metaphysical present, during which objects can instantiate causal relations. For problems with the extended present, see the section ‘Presentism and extensionalism’ above.
- 18 Such an experience of some object being F and not F at the same time would not amount to an experience of change *as* change. Having said this, Le Poidevin (2007), in discussing the “waterfall illusion”, suggests that there might be two neural mechanisms to detect change. Although we are only perceptually aware of what is momentarily present, we are also (strictly) perceptually aware of motion without a sense of location change (“pure motion”).
- 19 Most of what I say is also valid for the experience of duration.
- 20 Le Poidevin’s account of pure motion may be an exception. The account does not extend to experiences of duration though. For these experiences, Le Poidevin is plausibly interpreted as arguing that we need memory faculties to be aware of temporally extended episodes.
- 21 Realism is defended among others by Foster (1982), Dainton (2000), Le Poidevin (2007), Phillips (2010); antirealism among others by Chuard (2011) and Dennett (1991).
- 22 Exceptions are Prosser (2007), Frischhut (2013) and Hoerl (2014), who have argued against this assumption.
- 23 A static form of presentism is, though deeply implausible, not incoherent. Fine’s (2006) “fragmentalism”, for example, might be interpreted as a form of static presentism (though not by Fine).
- 24  version differs from Le Poidevin’s (2007).
- 25 There are various flaws one might find with AFE, independently of anti-realism. First, it is not at all obvious that we actually have experiences of temporal passage (see note 23). For more discussion on this point, see Prosser (2007), Deng (2013a), Frischhut (2013) and Hoerl (2014). Second, one might wonder whether presentism has the tools to account for any form of objective temporal passage. See, for example, Fine (2005) and Deng (2013b) for discussion.
- 26 The term “specious” points to the fact that the experienced or phenomenal present deviates from the objective present by having temporal depth, whereas the latter is standardly taken to be durationless.
- 27 A strange consequence of this view is that, to veridically experience A-change, we have to perceptually represent something that does not exist_s anymore.
- 28 Extensional accounts of temporal perception have been supported by Stern (2005 [1897]), Mundle (1954, 1966), Foster (1982) and Dainton (2000, 2008).
- 29 Dainton actually rejects the act/object distinction for experiences. This will play no important role here though.
- 30 As with retentionalism, I shall use representationalist vocabulary to present the theory. Dainton is not a representationalist. That said, his account is largely independent of these commitments (cf. Zahavi 2007: 454), and compatible with a representationalist view, although certain details of the view are more vulnerable to criticism if expressed in representationalist terms. This is not relevant for the arguments presented here.
- 31 Presentists who allow for events usually conceive them as having multiple temporal parts. There is thus a sense in which a temporally extended experience (*qua* event) exists for the presentist – by virtue of a constitutive present part that exists. But an analogous worry applies.

- 32 See Dainton (2000) for a similar example.
 33 Standardly, the objective present is taken to be instantaneous, an idea that can be traced back to St. Augustine. See Le Poidevin (2007) for a clear version of St. Augustine's argument.
 34 See McKinnon (2009) for one suggestion of how this could be done.
 35 See, for example, Benovsky (2013) for this point. McKinnon (2003) makes a similar point. Note, however, that the non-standard presentist is likely to deny that presentness implies simultaneity (cf. Dainton 2000).
 36 See McKinnon (2009).
 37 See also Benovsky (2013) for a similar worry.
 38 Unless, as I said in the section 'Presentism and the time-lag argument', one accepts some extremely counter-intuitive views about non-existing objects or relations.
 39 Many thanks for comments and discussion to Ian Phillips, Graham Peebles, Emiliano Boccardi and Giuliano Torrengo.

Further reading

- D. Zimmerman, "The A-theory of time, the B-theory of time, and 'taking tense seriously'", *Dialectica* 59(4) (2005): 401–457, and C. Bourne, *A Future for Presentism* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2006), provide a comprehensive defence of presentism.
 S. Prosser, *Experiencing Time* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2016), relates metaphysical issues of time with temporal experience. For an overview over temporal perception debates, see B. Dainton, "The experience of time and change", *Philosophy Compass* 3(4) (2008): 619–638.
 T. Gendler's and J. Hawthorne's *Perceptual Experience* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2006) offers a good collection on perceptual experience.
 On the extended metaphysical present, see M. S. Hestevold, "Presentism through think and thin", *Philosophical Quarterly* 89(3) (2008), 325–347, and J. Spencer, "A tale of two simples", *Philosophical Studies* 148(2) (2010), 167–181.

References

- Baron, S. (2012) "Presentism and causation revisited", *Philosophical Papers* 41(1): 1–21.
 Baron, S. (2013) "Tensed supervenience: A no go for presentism", *Southern Journal of Philosophy* 51(3): 383–401.
 Benovsky, J. (2013) "The present vs. the specious present", *Review of Philosophy and Psychology* 4(2): 193–203.
 Bigelow, J. (1991) "Worlds enough for time", *Noûs* 25(1): 1–19.
 Bigelow, J. (1996) "Presentism and properties", *Philosophical Perspectives* 10(Metaphysics): 35–52.
 Brogaard, B. (2000) "Presentist four-dimensionalism", *The Monist* 83(3): 341–356.
 Brogaard, B. (2006) "Tensed relations", *Analysis* 66(3): 194–202.
 Caplan, B. and Sanson, D. (2011) "Presentism and truthmaking", *Philosophy Compass* 6(3): 196–208.
 Chuard, P. (2011) "Temporal experiences and their parts", *Philosopher's Imprint* 11(11)
 Crisp, T. (2005) "Presentism and 'cross-time' relations", *American Philosophical Quarterly* 42(1): 5–17.
 Dainton, B. (2000) *Stream of Consciousness: Unity and Continuity in Conscious Experience*, London: Routledge.
 Dennett, D. (1991) *Consciousness Explained*, Harmondsworth, UK: Penguin.
 Deng, N. (2013a) "On explaining why time seems to pass", *Southern Journal of Philosophy* 51(3): 367–382.
 Deng, N. (2013b) "Fine's McTaggart, temporal passage, and the A versus B debate", *Ratio* 26(1): 19–34.
 Fine, K. (2006) "The reality of tense", *Synthese* 150(3): 399–414.
 Foster, J. (1982) *The Case for Idealism*, London: Routledge.
 Frischhut, A. M. (2013) "What experience cannot teach us about time", *Topoi* 34(1): 143–155.
 Hinchcliff, M. (1996) "The puzzle of change", *Philosophical Perspectives* 10: 119–136
 Hoerl, C. (2014) "Do we perceive passage?" *Philosophical Explorations* 17(2): 188–202.
 James, W. (1890) *The Principles of Psychology*, New York: Dover.
 Keller, S. (2004) "A problem for presentism", *Oxford Studies in Metaphysics* 1: 83–106.
 Kiverstein, J. (2010) "Making sense of phenomenal unity: An intentionalist account of temporal experience", *Royal Institute of Philosophy Supplement* 85(67): 155–181.
 Le Poidevin, R. (2004) "A puzzle concerning time perception", *Synthese* 142(1): 109–142.

Presentism and temporal experience

- Le Poidevin, R. (2007) *The Images of Time: An Essay on Temporal Representation*, Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.
- Lewis, D. (2004) "Void and object", in J. Collins, N. Hall and L. A. Paul (eds), *Causation and Counterfactuals*, Cambridge, MA: MIT, pp. 277–290.
- Lowe, E. J. (2006) "How real is substantial change?" *The Monist* 89(3): 275–293.
- Markosian, N. (2004) "A defence of presentism", in D. Zimmerman (ed.), *Oxford Studies in Metaphysics*, Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.
- Maudlin, T. (2007) *The Metaphysics Within Physics*, Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.
- McDaniel, B. (2010) "Presentism and absence causation: An exercise in mimicry", *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 88(2): 323–332.
- McKinnon, N. (2003) "Presentism and consciousness", *Australian Journal of Philosophy* 81(3): 305–323.
- Merricks, T. (2007) *Truth and Ontology*, Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.
- Mundle, C. W. K. (1954) "How specious is the 'specious present'?" *Mind* 63(249): 26–48.
- Phillips, I. (2010) "Perceiving temporal properties", *European Journal of Philosophy* 18(2):176–202.
- Power, S. (2013) "Perceiving external things and the time-lag argument", *European Journal of Philosophy* 21(1): 94–117.
- Prior, A. N. (1968a) "Now", *Noûs* 2(2): 101–119.
- Prior, A. N. (1968b) *Changes in Events and Changes in Things*. In *Papers on Time and Tense*, Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press.
- Prosser, S. (2007) "Could we experience the passage of time?" *Ratio* 20(1): 75–90.
- Rashbrook-Cooper, O. (manuscript) *Temporal Presence and Time-Lags*, available at http://www.philosophy.ox.ac.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0010/30889/Time_Lag_II.pdf. Accessed 1 January 2017.
- Schuster, M. M. (1986) "Is the flow of time subjective?" *The Review of Metaphysics* 39(4): 695–714.
- Sider, T. (1999) "Presentism and ontological commitment", *Journal of Philosophy* 96(7): 325–347.
- Stern, W. L. (1897/2005) "Mental presence-time", in C. Wolfe (ed.), *The New Yearbook for Phenomenology and Phenomenological Research*, London: College Publications.
- Tallant, J. (2010) "Time for presence?" *Philosophia* 38(2): 271–280.
- Tye, M. (2003) *Consciousness and Persons: Unity and Identity*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Williams, D. C. (1951) "The myth of passage", *Journal of Philosophy* 48(15): 457–472.
- Zahavi, D. (2007) "Perception of duration presupposes duration of perception – or does it? Husserl and Dainton on time", *International Journal of Philosophical Studies* 15(3): 453–471.