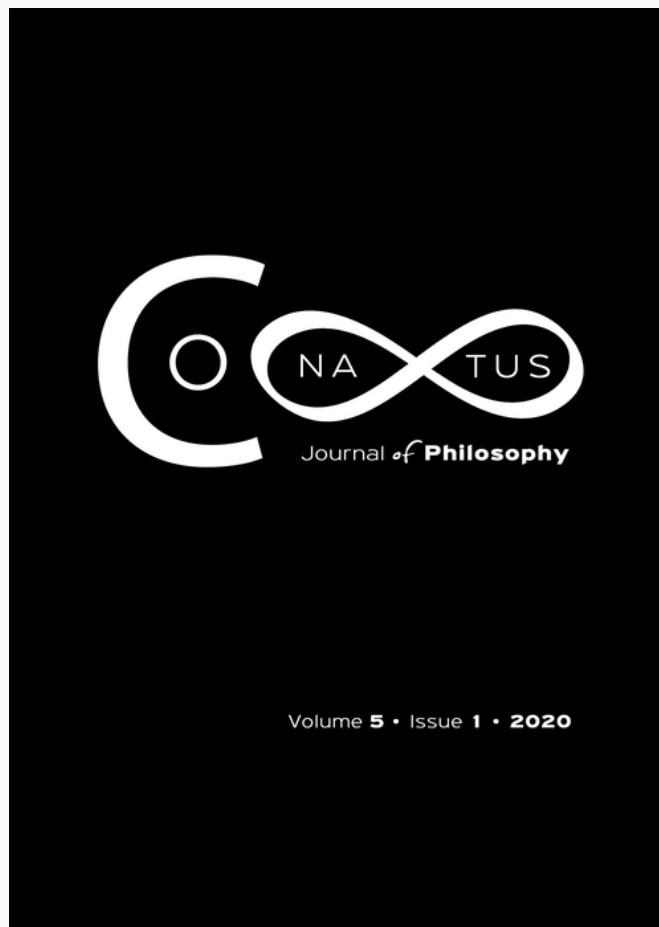


Conatus - Journal of Philosophy

Vol 5, No 1 (2020)

Conatus - Journal of Philosophy



Nefarious Presentism: A Recourse to Primitivism

Aderonke Ajiboro

doi: [10.12681/cjp.21494](https://doi.org/10.12681/cjp.21494)

Copyright © 2020, Aderonke Ajiboro



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/).

To cite this article:

Ajiboro, A. (2020). Nefarious Presentism: A Recourse to Primitivism. *Conatus - Journal of Philosophy*, 5(1), 9–26.
<https://doi.org/10.12681/cjp.21494>

Nefarious Presentism: A Recourse to Primitivism

Aderonke Ajiboro

Obafemi Awolowo University, Nigeria

E-mail address: aogundiwin@gmail.com

ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5622-1158>

Abstract

Presentism is one of the various views in the discourse on the existence of time and spatio-temporal reality which holds that only the present is real and also that only present things exist. Neil McKinnon characterizes presentism in some ways that are all problematic, although he claims that the most appealing of all is the statement that “only present entities exist.” This view permeates all thoughts about presentism, and it has led to problems about the formulation of presentism. The link between accepting the existence of a temporal part (present) and the events that have that part as its spatio-temporal reference creates a hub of debate among presentists, and this raises a lot of issues not just in metaphysics, but in other areas of philosophical discourse as well. Tallant and Ingram take a challenging position on this issue as presentists in their own right. For them, the requisite status of a presentist properly so-called should be of a commitment to the reality of the present exclusively. In this paper, I engage the views of Tallant and Ingram on the problems of presentism such as triviality and truthtaking as regards ontological implications. I will argue that the avoidance of ontological commitment in nefarious presentism does appear to avoid the problem of truthtaking, which implies avoiding an analysis of truth in order to solve the problem of truthtaking. I will also argue that this avoidance to address the principle of un-analyzability of thisness is a recourse to primitivism.

Key-words: *time; analyzability; nefarious; upstanding; presentism; existence; thisness*

I. Introduction

The metaphysical representation of reality is one of the problems in discussions on the philosophy of time. Presentism¹ attempts to address this problem, and this brings forward a typical challenge. This is succinctly put by Simon Keller's view of presentism as,

¹ Thomas M. Crisp, “On Presentism and Triviality,” in *Oxford Studies in Metaphysics*, vol. 1, 15-20, ed. Dean W. Zimmerman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 16.

[...] the belief that only present things exist. If something doesn't exist now, says the presentist, then it doesn't exist at all.²

There seems to be an assumption that things do exist in the present. However, such commitment does not sufficiently explain the ontological persistence or otherwise of things when the present is not present or no longer present, as regards the truth of past events or things. This commitment can be said to be the basis of the distinction that Tallant and Ingram made of the two factions of presentists.³

Upstanding presentists aim to meet the challenge, posting presently existing truthmakers for truths about the past; nefarious presentists aim to shirk their responsibilities, using the language of truthmaker theory but without paying any ontological price.⁴

The interaction of time and reality is at the center of the debate on presentism. Due to there being an assumed ontological implication that presentism points at, not of the present but of events or actions that can be said to have happened in the past but referred to the present. The link between accepting the existence of a temporal part (present) and the events that have that part as their spatio-temporal reference creates a hub of debate among presentists⁵ and this raises a lot of issues not just in metaphysics but in other areas of philosophical discourse. Tallant and Ingram take a challenging position on this issue as presentists in their own right. For them, the requisite status of a presentist properly so-called should be of commitment to the reality of the present exclusively, rather than a commitment to establish the ontology of events in other spatio-temporal parts, such as the past and the future.⁶

II. Nefarious Presentism

The basis for the debate between the upstanding presentists and the nefarious presentists is about the establishing or justification of temporal ontology

² Simon Keller, "Presentism and Truthmaking," in *Oxford Studies in Metaphysics*, vol. 1, 83-104, ed. Dean W. Zimmerman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 84.

³ Jonathan Tallant, and David Ingram, "Nefarious Presentism," *The Philosophical Quarterly* 65, no. 260 (2015): 355.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 355.

⁵ Neil McKinnon, "Characterising Presentism," in *New Papers on the Present: Focus on Presentism*, 13-30, eds. Roberto Ciuni, Kristie Miller, and Giuliano Torreng (München: Philosophia, 2013): 14.

⁶ Tallant, and Ingram, "Nefarious Presentism," 356.

in talking about spatio-temporal events in the presentists' language.⁷ Upstanding presentism is the view that there is a means of providing the ontological ground required for the truth of propositions about the past.⁸ This view intends to solve the problem of temporal ontology in the presentists' language by attempting to provide truthmakers regarding past events.⁹

On the other hand, nefarious presentism holds that the presentists' language can strictly quantify over present things and also that events which are no more in the present or not yet in the present are translatable. Such present tense quantification, with no commitment whatsoever to the actual existence of those events that are not available, satisfies the requirement of temporal ontology for a translation.¹⁰ In other words, the problem of temporal ontology seems not of grave concern to the nefarious presentist. Although Matt Farr suggests that the question of temporal ontology in presentism can be addressed by admitting an entirely different opinion from presentism (that is, eternalism), his view makes clear the problem that beset the nefarious presentist.¹¹ For Farr, the discourse on temporal ontology is faced with the problem of triviality as Matt Farr notes.¹² It is quite obvious that Jonathan Tallant and David Ingram intend to avoid this problem headlong by prescribing that all presentists should be nefarious presentists.¹³ Thus, the question arises on how to ground the truth of statements that exhibit spatio-temporal ontology and parts about events. For both the upstanding presentists and the nefarious presentists, the truth of presently existing events is taken as granted, given their basic claim that only present things exist. However, the crux of the matter is how to put forward the truth of past and future events in the presentists' language, such that it is backed by the truthmaker which can be referred to actual existence and at the same time can be quantified in the present. That is, grounding the truths of statements where the truthmaker is not present but can be justifiably referred to as giving support to the language of the present. Keller succinctly puts the problem thus:

⁷ Theodore Sider, "Quantifiers and Temporal Ontology," *Mind* 115, no. 457 (2006): 79.

⁸ Tallant, and Ingram, "Nefarious Presentism," 356-357.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 356.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ Matt Farr, "Temporal Ontology in Perspective," accessed May 11, 2017, <http://www.mattfarr.co.uk/files/theme/top.pdf>.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ Tallant, and Ingram, "Nefarious Presentism," 356-357.

The problem is how there can be past- and future tensed truths though the past and future do not exist [...] the presentist can avoid the problem only if she endorses some very controversial metaphysical views. While the truthmaking problem (as I will call it) does not stand as a refutation of presentism, it does show that presentism comes at a price. Whether or not presentism is plausible depends upon whether or not that price is worth paying.¹⁴

We can say that the price to be paid that Keller alludes to is what Tallant and Ingram point at, which is, the jettisoning of ontological commitment by the presentist. This view is mostly a non-commitment to the temporal ontology of events that are not presently existing but are rendered in the presentists' language.

The range of responses offered by presentists to the truthmaker objection suggests another possible response. Some presentists look to deploy "in virtue of language," without making any ontological commitments. They deny the premise (All truths require truthmakers i.e. "ontological grounds"). They tell us that there were dinosaurs is true because there were dinosaurs, where that claim is not one that commits us to the existence of anything in the past or present. More, they say that there were dinosaurs is true in virtue of there having been dinosaurs. Following a position I've argued with David Ingram call this a "nefarious" response to the truthmaker objection. If that move can be made in response to the truthmaker objection (a significant "if").¹⁵

The present tense quantification of a non-present event where the truthmaker is absent summarily presupposes the truth of the proposition about the event. Also, it justifies the temporal existence of the event. It does seem, however, that the position Tallant and Ingram take, gives a specific focus on the suggestion by Keller on the problem of ontological commitment as associated with truthmaking. For Keller,

The truthmaking problem does not refute presentism, but it does leave the presentist with the twin burdens of choosing an

¹⁴ Keller, 85.

¹⁵ Jonathan Tallant, "Presentism, Persistence and Trans-temporal Dependence," *Philosophical Studies* 175 (2018): 2214.

account of what underlies past and future-tensed truths and of showing that it is worth making the unattractive commitments that such an account will inevitably involve.¹⁶

Regarding the above statement, nefarious presentists will tend towards providing an account of truthmakers for past and future events as an unattractive commitment, as events as such are avoidable. As a philosophical system, truthmaking entails existence. The truth of a proposition entails that there must be a state of affairs that obtains or occurs as stated in the proposition. This means that what is true depends upon what exists.¹⁷ The possibility of having truthmakers that will justify the truth of past and future events for the nefarious presentist will be a futile effort. For instance, the truth of the proposition “Julius Caesar was a Roman Emperor” will require that there is an actual period when it was described as “Julius Caesar is the Roman Emperor.” However, that spatio-temporal ontology is no more captured in a state of affairs that presently exists, hence the nefarious presentists’ claim that there need not be an analysis of the past event in such a manner that will require analysis by truthmaking appears convincing. This shield from analysis, that nefarious presentists allow, seems to solve the problem of plural tensed statement and quantifiers. Properties of things do exist as they are being instantiated in the state of affairs that are experienced simply. It is the attempt to find an interconnectedness among various state of affairs and properties identified that make analysis challenging.

However, these properties are somewhat undeniable aspects of reality. Heil describes properties of things as “features of the world that make a difference in how objects behave or would behave.”¹⁸ In other words, the properties that are instantiated have a way of establishing the existence of an event in spatio-temporality. These properties, according to Heil, are such as science “teases out.” They are what “figures in the laws of nature, and laws govern the behaviour of objects.” As much as he notes that defining the properties of things as they are instantiated is problematic, it is evident that he regards properties as dispositional powers in their possessors.¹⁹ These properties could be referred to as causal or relational powers in the objects expressed in their interaction with the environment. Hence, for presentism, the properties of object exhibited are taken to be the truthmakers for the state of affairs in spatio-temporal ontology. There is a circular problem in this

¹⁶ Tallant, and Ingram, “Nefarious Presentism,” 361.

¹⁷ Ibid., 361.

¹⁸ John Heil, “Properties and Powers,” *Oxford Studies in Metaphysics*, vol. 1, 223-254, ed. Dean W. Zimmerman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 222.

¹⁹ Ibid., 225.

view: if time is conceived “as a series of instants that are made out of events tied together by a relation of simultaneity, a different one for all instants,”²⁰ it implies that the properties of objects or events, as the case may be, are assumed in the spatio-temporal ontology where the truthmakers themselves have their source. By alluding to these temporal properties as an indicator of truthmakers, the ontology of non-present things is rendered as present truths. Still, it is in providing such a justification for an ontological commitment that the nefarious presentist turns away. Nefarious presentists argue that temporal properties do not suffice to provide truthmakers for the truth of non-present events.

According to Tallant and Ingram, the instantiation of temporal distributional properties does not admit of change as an existential fact.²¹ By this, they imply that things in the past can be other than believed to be, or that which obtains. This argument is itself problematic considering that the events shift into the temporal part regarded as past are fixed. So also, when a temporal distributional property is instantiated, it is fixed and immutable.²² This means that for an event that exists presently, its temporal distributional property – as at that point is fixed and immutable, its spatio-temporal ontology, cannot be revised. When a thing or an event instantiates a property at time T1, that instantiation itself is a truthmaker, because it is established as a fact that is actual, the possibility of a change of that instantiation as at T1 is next to zero. Whatever change will occur about what is instantiated, will be fixed in another temporal location. This includes all properties involved, either they are causal or relational.

Temporal distributional properties (of being past, being present or being future) are introduced to address this challenge. For Ross Cameron, these TDPs are capable of change such that the instantiations in the instants of time do not in any way affect the grounding of truth they provide for entities.²³ For instance, the property of age is correlative to the instantiation of TDPs, as of being-a-boy-then-being-a-man-then-being-an-old-man. The claim evident in Cameron’s argument is that movement (change) of along the line of TDPs, is also exhibited in the movement (change) in the property of age. Tallant and Ingram analyze this argument as a solution to the

²⁰ Jiri Benovsky, “Relational and Substantival Ontologies, and the Nature and the Role of Primitives in Ontological Theories,” *Erkenntnis: An International Journal of Analytic Philosophy* 73, no. 1 (2010): 107.

²¹ Tallant, and Ingram, “Nefarious Presentism,” 358.

²² Ibid., 359-360.

²³ Ross Cameron, “Truthmaking for Presentists,” in *Oxford Studies in Metaphysics*, vol. 6, 55-100, eds. Karen Bennet, and Dean W. Zimmerman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 58.

truthmaker problem, which will defeat the non-commitment of nefarious presentists to ontology:

To see how TDPs solve the truthmaker problem, consider the following (vastly simplified) example. Suppose that Ross is now a man and was a boy. “Ross was a boy” is true, but what makes it true? In Cameron’s metaphysic, Ross instantiates the TDP, being-a-boy-then-being-a-man-then-being-an-old-man, and the age property. Notice that between them, the TDP and age property fix not only how Ross is now, but also how Ross was. Namely: a boy. Hence, the union of the TDP and the age property serves to make true “Ross was a boy,” and so we have a solution to the truthmaker problem.²⁴

However, the idea of change, which was expressed by Tallant and Ingram is overly extravagant in addition to being vastly simplified, as suggested above. This is because it can be argued that the entity “man” has properties that may not be captured by the TDP and age property; properties that may be non-spatial and non-temporal that may be of essential instantiation to the beingness of man such as rationality, moods etc. The being-a-boy-then-being-a-man-then-being-an-old-man TDP expresses a change in time and distributional property of the entity “man.” This, however, does not exclude “man” from the category of entities in which it is examined through the analysis of spatio-temporal ontology and truthmaking. Non-human objects, activities and events may well exhibit TDPs, that sometimes may be confined to the scope of space.

For instance, a cup placed on a table will maintain the same spatio-temporal status except there is a change of events in its space-time boundary, such as being moved by another entity. In such case statement of fact about the cup changes. This is unlike the being-a-boy-being-a-man-being-an-old-man idea of the TDP. But for Tallant and Ingram to posit the change in the property of entities or entities themselves is to fault the need of truthmakers for a statement about the present,²⁵ since presently existing entities will have to remain so and as such. TDPs are of no consequence to the truthmaker problem in presentism, especially upstanding presentism. This will imply that presently existing entities are fixed in their spatio-temporal ontology, and this leads to the problem of triviality again. The statement “Phillip is the King of France now” with a state of affairs that is a truthmaker in the present, will remain fixed in the truth of the spatio-temporal ontology captured.

²⁴ Tallant, and Ingram, “Nefarious Presentism,” 359.

²⁵ Ibid.

The concept of hyper-change and hyper-time as put forward by Ross Cameron does little to address the challenge posed against presentism as regards the idea of change. The question of time and change as being jostled by the presentists is not straightened yet, and then the concept of hyper-change and hyper-time which is pulled into the debate, only makes it more problematic.

As simple as it may sound, Tallant and Ingram conflate the idea of change and temporal location in their argument. A fixed event in the past is so, not because of the truthmaker involved, but because of the temporal location of its occurrence. The statement, “Phillip is the King of France now” will be banally false when rendered in the present where the truthmaker is fixed in the past. Furthermore, “Phillip was the King of France” will be problematic statement to analyze in reference to its spatio-temporal ontology because the truthmaker of these statements is not presently existing. Nefarious presentists avoid this problem due to the rejection of the distribution of properties over space and time. All the nefarious presentists will claim that “Phillip was the King of France” is fixed in the past as true, regarding the state of affairs that obtains for the statement to be to true. There is no strict necessitation between a proposition and the truthmaker in the present, when the temporal location of events is distributed beyond the scope of occurrence.²⁶

Tallant and Ingram are of the view that presentists with a commitment to spatio-temporal ontology use necessitation loosely. For them,

It's not merely the case that Caesar's existence necessitates the future truth of “Caesar existed.” There is more to it than that. After all, the existence of any contingent existent (e.g. Queen Elizabeth's left eyebrow, Pokemon, batteries, etc.) necessitates the future truth of “ $2+2=4$.” But the relationship between Queen Elizabeth's eyebrow and the truth of “ $2+2=4$ ” is quite different from the way in which the existence of Caesar fixes that it will be the case Caesar existed (and “Caesar existed” will be true). Mere necessitation seems quite the wrong way to describe the nature of this fixing.²⁷

The nature of fixing here cannot be one of mere necessitation but of strict necessitation. This allows the claim by nefarious presentists that truths regarding the past do not require an analysis of the present. However, strict necessitation, as they are true cannot apply because logical truths have no temporal boundaries. The truth of the arithmetic statement $2+2=4$ is

²⁶ Ibid., 361.

²⁷ Ibid.

not bounded in a spatio-temporal ontology; its truth is fixed, while the contingent existent of Queen Elizabeth's eyebrow is not fixed across time. We can argue that the relationship between the two objects will be of implication, not necessitation. That is, affirming that the truthmaker of a contingent existent is fixed, allows us to infer the necessity of logical truth in the future. However, the logical truth itself is not restricted by the scope of time.

This implies that the contingency of non-present events should allow for strict necessity; this is because the nature of fixing for the nefarious presentist is such that logical truths exhibit. Therefore, there is an interchange of the idea of necessitation and implication by the nefarious presentist.²⁸ The upstanding presentist may argue that implication suffices to explain how the truth of non-present events is established by the fixed properties they instantiate. But this will not do well to address the idea of “fixing as necessitation” by the nefarious presentist. If presentists generally conceive of necessitation *ab initio* as strict as in logical necessity, the claim of upstanding presentists fails, since the truthmakers that will admit of the truth of a proposition about the present are of strict contingency. This is because if the upstanding presentist is to go the way of primitivism where tensed truths are unanalyzed,²⁹ they might as well allow that mere necessity will suffice to provide an indication of truthmakers of the past statements, where truth about the past fixes or implies a truth about the present.

It, therefore, seems upstanding presentism does so much as to accommodate all experience in existence as regards temporal ontology and temporal location. But the attempt to give an inclusive existent to the spatio-temporal category of the past about truthmakers drives presentism to the fundamental question; that is how can the propositions of the non-present be regarded as true given by the truthmakers for such events which are also non-present? The result is that the upstanding presentism is inevitable as long as their position is to retain any attraction. The denial of ontological commitment in nefarious presentism implies that propositions about the present can be made in terms that will not involve triviality or banality. But will this denial by nefarious presentists cover tensed propositions about the present as well as tenseless propositions? An assumption that comes with nefarious presentism is that all talk about the present is of a tenseless kind. In other words, the un-analyzability of statements without a commitment to ontology avoids the problems of triviality, but this is a direct plunge into the principles of primitivism. The truth of propositions about the present

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid., 356.

need not be analyzed with the availability of truthmakers. If nefarious presentists hold this claim, then they also face the challenges that plague primitivism.

III. The Un-analyzable Present, Thisness and Triviality

Nefarious presentism as an adequate theory of temporal existence should be able to account for all the use of tenses in language. In other words, both tensed and tenseless quantification should be well explicated with the criteria that the nefarious presentists set out into their proposal. It should also be able to cover any range of quantification, either singular or plural. In combating the challenge of the truthmaker objection against presentism, nefarious presentists seem to have found a way to deny ontological commitment. A statement such as “There is a king named Charles” is understood in the tenseless sense may not be much of a problem to the nefarious presentist, even so, it faces the triviality problem. But by the extent of language use, will the appeal to un-analyzable truths explain tensed quantifiers, as in the instance of “There have been two kings named Charles?”

The principles that Tallant and Ingram endorse is that nefarious presentism should hold its consistent with primitivism.³⁰ Primitivism holds that the truth about the events of the past, which are within the present in their scope of utterance, are simply un-analyzable. The move to analyze such statement will only be futile, since truthmakers for such entities are not located within the temporal scope of utterance. David Lewis explains two variants of primitivism as follows:

Version I. To be a quantifier is to function semantically like a quantifier. There must be a domain of entities, there must be a way for members of that domain to satisfy predicate phrases, and a quantifier phrase indicates whether some, or all, or none, or two, or infinitely many, or several, or [...] things in the indicated domain satisfy a predicate. Since there are no domains of past or future things, “tensed quantifiers” are not really quantifiers.

Version II. To be a quantifier is to function inferentially like a quantifier. Tensed quantifiers are indeed quantifiers, because they obey (appropriately tensed forms of) the usual rules of quantificational logic. However, the usual semantic story about domains and satisfaction does not apply to them.³¹

³⁰ Ibid., 361.

³¹ David Lewis, “Tensed Quantifiers,” in *Oxford Studies in Metaphysics*, vol. 1, 3-14, ed. Dean W. Zimmerman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 12.

From Version I, tenseless statements are explicated semantically without the restriction of quantifiers. In other words, the quantification of spatio-temporal entities is the mere use of words. In Version II, quantifiers are inferential. They are intended to appear in the explication of spatio-temporal entities. Although Lewis argues that the distinction between these two versions is superficial, I think it is a genuine one. If nefarious presentists are to pick up the primitivists' ambition of un-analyzability, especially the Version I., then it is evident in the move by Tallant and Ingram in laying out two principles of primitivism:

- (1) Truths about the past are expressed using primitive (and analyzable) tense operator.
- (2) The primitive (and unanalyzable) tense operators do not pick out some distinctive ontological category or aspect of reality.³²

These two principles align with the view of primitivism as explicated by Lewis,³³ since they do not deny that tense operators indicate that there is a scope of time that needs explication in the presentists language even if the truthmaker is not present. However, as he notes, primitive tensed quantification requires a temporal analysis which the nefarious presentist will not be inclined to carry out, since this will run him into identifying temporal ontology of the past.

Thus, the nefarious presentist is left to give a presentist translation of non-present truths with recourse to triviality (in this case where the truthmaker is presently existing). Ordinarily, the problem of triviality, as presented against the presentists, can be addressed with truthmakers for presently existing entities. For instance, one can argue that when the presentist says, “only present things exist now,” “only present things exist presently” and so on, it is implied that there is a truthmaker for the propositions of the present reality to be true. However, it takes a different turn with non-present reality. The language of the nefarious presentist allows the translation of non-present things in its non-present tense. For instance, “it was the case that p is true because it was the case that p.” The tense operator in this proposition “was” is presented bluntly as primitive and un-analyzed. This is a case of triviality in an obtrusive sense.

The past tensed quantifier needs analysis if it is to be rendered in a presentists' language and avoid triviality that will arise from the camp of

³² Tallant, and Ingram, “Nefarious Presentism,” 361.

³³ Lewis, 12.

the nefarious presentist.³⁴ The nefarious presentist disregards this need for analysis. Howsoever, it is being determined, a translation of a proposition such as “There have been a king named Charles,” in a restricted domain of quantification which is the present, will have to be analyzed to arrive at being explained in the unrestricted domain of quantifications in the past or future. Consider the following supposed translations of the presentists following Lewis’ explication:

“There has been a king named John.”

- (a) It has been that (There is a king named John).
- (b) There has been a king named John because there was a king named John.
- (c) There has been a king named John because there has been a king named John.

From all of these statements above, it is evident that there is a level of analysis. The statements does not require being analytic to establish the necessitation of a truthmaker that has the possibility of change, as Tallant and Ingram argue. However, proceeding to give a worthwhile presentist translation, nefarious or not, requires that the past tense quantification be somewhat explicated.

In (a) above, the span operator “it has been that,” is used to explicate the temporal ontology of the original statement. In contrast, the statement is substantially given by the presentist’s restricted quantification. The translation (b) is somewhat primitive but not un-analyzable, and this is due to the tense operator “there has been” is summarily implied in “there was.” This translation does not necessarily include a truthmaker and it does have an indication of being trivial. I am of the view that the tense operator “there was” can be further analyzed in a way that the tense operator captures the temporal location of the event.

Tallant and Ingram’s view will (for consistency) align with (c), which is presented in a primitive un-analyzable way and which presents not only an unambitious move for the nefarious presentists. but also one belaboured with ambiguity and triviality. The span operator denotes a time interval that most certainly includes the unrestricted domain of quantification. To admit this for the nefarious presentist will be to deny also the restricted domain of quantification. It can be rightly deduced that nefarious presentism will hold on to an analysis of substantival ontology in its proposal to deal with quantification.

³⁴ Ibid.

According to the substantivalist theory of time, events and things “are located at” or “occur at” different instants of time and these instants are seen as being independent of the events or things they “contain.” Time is then a substance composed of such instants. It is thus easy for this view to account for periods of time without change, that is, for periods where all change stops and the universe is “frozen” during a certain interval of time since instants are not dependent on the changes that occur at them. Similarly, the view is also typically taken to be able to accommodate periods of “empty time,” that is, periods where no events occur at all. Metaphorically, time is here conceived of as a container that can contain events and things, but that is capable of not containing anything.³⁵

The above conception of time is consistent with the nefarious presentists’ view of spatio-temporal ontology as not admitting of distributional properties. In other words, events are fixed in the spatio-temporal location in which they occur, and this suffices to explain the truth of past events at the time of utterance, that is, in the present. Furthermore, Jiri Benovsky claims that,

[...] instants are primitively numerically distinct entities that do not require to be distinguished qualitatively (since, in the first place, they do not have a qualitative nature such that they could be distinguished in a qualitative way). Metaphorically speaking, instants are containers that are in themselves qualitatively indistinguishable and that, during a global freeze, contain qualitatively indistinguishable stuff, but that are primitively numerically distinct. Instants conceived of in such a way are what I will call “problem-solvers.” In short, a problem-solver is a primitive of a theory that allows us to solve a problem. In general, it is probably the case that all primitives are, at least to some extent, problem-solvers, for primitives, are typically introduced in any theory to do an explanatory job that they manage to do by having the primitive capacity to do so. In the case of substantivalism, how can the theory account for the possibility of periods of time without change? By using its primitive notion of instants that are qualitatively indistinguishable but that are primitively numerically distinct. This premise is thus a “problem-

³⁵ Benovsky, 104.

solver” since without appealing to it the theory would not be able to accommodate the possibility of global freezes and since it succeeds to achieve its end only in virtue of the postulation that it can do so. It may seem from what I just said that I take substantivalism to be an unappealing view that does not know better than primitively postulating solutions to its theoretical challenges. But this is not so: every theory has its primitives [...] and every theory has the right to do so since without the use of such problem solvers we would not be able to get very far in the construction of metaphysical theories [...].³⁶

This view of primitives that were expressed by Benovsky captures the focus of nefarious presentism in turning to un-analyzable truths of a past event (understood to be qualitatively indistinguishable instants of time described above). These instants of time, especially in the case of plural tensed quantification, are qualitatively indistinguishable because of the nature of fixing earlier discussed. For a proposition such as, “There have been five kings named Charles,” as at the time of utterance, the instants of time for the temporal distribution is qualitatively absent or indistinguishable since no truthmaker(s) will ever be alluded to for the truth of the statement. This need not be of any ontological commitment to the truth of the statement, since the quantification is understood as indistinguishable in its temporal location. This view tends to be consistent with what Ingram calls a “thisness ontology.”³⁷ Ingram defines the notion of thisness as follows:

it 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.³⁸

Making an assumption of the property of an object for Ingram is somewhat dependent on the spatio-temporality of an object. But the notion of thisness goes beyond the truthmaker’s condition to establishing the state of affairs. This notion of Ingram’s in order to vindicate presentism (nefarious)

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ David Ingram, “Thisnesses, Propositions and Truth,” *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly* 99, no. 3 (2016): 2.

³⁸ Ibid., 3-4.

is clearly shifting ground from the non-commitment to ontology of nefarious presentism. The property being-*x* or being-identical-with-*x*, can be distinguished as an ontological category. The thisness of an object being described as primitive and purely non-qualitative can be regarded as implying that the property of the object is fixed. As such, the nature of fixing that Tallant and Ingram argue for plays out in the thisness of the present.

- (a) The Nature of a Thisness – every object instantiates a thisness; a thisness is a particular, primitive, purely non-qualitative property of an object.
- (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 characterizes the object that instantiates *T*, *x*; the relevant properties of *T* initially correspond to the lower-order properties of *x*.³⁹

From the above, the thisness of an object continues to exist even when the truthmaker of the object is no longer present. This is a quite ambivalent position to hold for a nefarious presentist, and as such the coherence of the principles (un-analysability, non-qualitativeness) of the notion of primitivism is questionable as the nature, life and character of the thisness as a property of an object do not solve the truthmaker problem pointedly. How is thisness so different from the temporal distributional properties that Cameron suggests? Phil Corkum notes that Tallant and Ingram are caught into the web of temporal extension beyond the present and the legitimacy of the acceptance or denial of this extension is yet to be sufficiently answered by these scholars.

Tallant and Ingram thus take the distributionalist to be caught in an inconsistency: temporal distributions require extensions of time, but presentists must deny that there are such extensions.⁴⁰

Contrariwise, the idea of thisness as a property of objects in spatio-temporal ontology as Ingram put forward seems to reintroduce the idea of distributional property into presentism. How can we possibly describe properties (as a

³⁹ Ibid., 5.

⁴⁰ Phil Corkum, "Presentism, Truthmakers and Distributional Properties," *Synthese* 191 (2014): 3433.

distribution or thisness)? Corkum discusses the legitimacy of reference to temporal distributional properties a truthmakers:

Are temporal distributional properties legitimate truthmakers? Under what conditions do such properties conform to the prohibition against cheating? [...] temporal distributional properties meet this requirement just in case they are not reducible to non-distributional or uniformly distributional properties. For readability, let me say that temporal distributional properties are reducible or irreducible, and leave the reference to that to which they are or are not reducible, non-distributional or uniformly distributional properties, tacit.⁴¹

Corkum's argument above also suggests the un-analyzability of the present, even with the distribution of properties as the attempt by Ingram to use thisness does little to address the analysis of the present without the distribution of properties of the object beyond the present. Hence, the presentist claims about the spatio-temporal location of an object when the truthmaker is no longer in the present can well be acknowledged. This move towards primitivism by nefarious presentists also faces the problems of semantics and inference, as indicated by Lewis. However, with the notion of thisness and distribution of property, once an object instantiates the property in existence, it addresses the tensed quantification in the domain of entities under semantics and also the quantifier phrases in inference. Even so, it may well attempt to reduce the demand of analyzing span operators, which, as Lewis argues, cannot be properly understood when they are un-analyzed.

If nefarious presentism admits that objects which are into the spatio-temporal location have properties and that there is a nature of fixing on those properties which are un-analyzable without losing their spatio-temporal location, then the burden of triviality is also on the nefarious presentist, if an attempt of explication is made. The statement "There was a king named Charles in Britain" will be accepted by nefarious presentists not due to its ontological commitment to a truthmaker that supervenes on the beingness of a state of affairs, but due to the spatio-temporal location which is a present T1, when it did exist that "There is a king named Charles." The properties of the entity are regarded as distributed over time, as the present is no longer existing in its spatio-temporal occurrence, and by implication for the nefarious presentist it is un-analyzable.

⁴¹ Corkum, 3434.

IV. Conclusion

The nefarious presentist successfully avoids to analyze these statements about the present. The primitive, in this case, will be either tensed or tenseless quantifiers, span operators, in singular or plural quantification. Tallant also notes that the nefarious presentists' position allows them to be described as "cheats" without an ontological commitment,⁴² and they claim to provide a sufficient presentist view on the un-analyzability of the present. Benovsky also makes the claim that primitives in a way cut off the discourse on a topic too soon for a conclusion.⁴³ If an object or property or word can be considered as un-analyzable, the need to provide further explication on the proposer is somewhat reduced. This is expressly shown in the following example:

nefarious cheats (like Tallant) will say "it was the case that p" is true because it was the case that p'. Here, the "was" is primitive and unanalyzable. Notice, also, that Tallant will agree that this "was" does not help us to pick out any ontology; it does not help us to speak of any distinctive metaphysical category or kind.⁴⁴

The un-analyzability of the tense operator 'was' will inevitably lead to the problem of triviality, if the distribution of properties over spatio-temporal locations is admitted by the nefarious presentist, even in the mildest sense. as it is evident in the notion of thisness, that Ingram suggests, or in virtue of a property having existed, as Tallant suggests.⁴⁵ It is quite evident that although nefarious presentists claim that their view does not pick out any ontology, the insistence on this claim will end up being a self-defeating one. A tense operator applies to a thing, either concept or object, and the existence of it, even of the Menoingian kind can be inferred. Hence the nefarious presentists will face the challenge of triviality of truth in their claim of un-analyzability.

References

Benovsky, Jiri. "Relational and Substantival Ontologies, and the Nature and the Role of Primitives in Ontological Theories." *Erkenntnis: An International Journal of Analytic Philosophy* 73, no. 1 (2010): 101-121.

⁴² Tallant, and Ingram, "Nefarious Presentism," 361.

⁴³ Benovsky, 106.

⁴⁴ Tallant, and Ingram, "Nefarious Presentism," 363.

⁴⁵ Tallant, "Presentism, Persistence and Trans-temporal Dependence," 2214-2216.

Cameron, Ross. "Truthmaking for Presentists." In *Oxford Studies in Metaphysics*, vol. 6, 55-100. Edited by Karen Bennet, and Dean W. Zimmerman. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011.

Corkum, Phil. "Presentism, Truthmakers and Distributional Properties." *Synthese* 191 (2014): 3427-3446.

Crisp, Thomas M. "On Presentism and Triviality." In *Oxford Studies in Metaphysics*, vol. 1, 15-20. Edited by Dean W. Zimmerman. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004.

Farr, Matt. "Temporal Ontology in Perspective." Accessed May 11, 2017. <http://www.mattfarr.co.uk/files/theme/top.pdf>.

Heil, John. "Properties and Powers." In *Oxford Studies in Metaphysics*, vol. 1, 223-254. Edited by Dean W. Zimmerman. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004.

Ingram, David. "Thisnesses, Propositions and Truth." *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly* 3 (2016): 442-463.

Keller, Simon. "Presentism and Truthmaking." In *Oxford Studies in Metaphysics*, vol. 1, 83-104. Edited by Dean W. Zimmerman. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004.

McKinnon, Neil. "Characterising Presentism." In *New Papers on the Present: Focus on Presentism*, 13-30. Edited by Roberto Ciuni, Kristie Miller, and Giuliano Torrengo. München: Philosophia, 2013.

Lewis, David. "Tensed Quantifiers." In *Oxford Studies in Metaphysics*, vol. 1, 3-14. Edited by Dean W. Zimmerman. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004.

Sider, Theodore. "Quantifiers and Temporal Ontology." *Mind* 115, no. 497 (2006): 75-97.

Tallant, Jonathan, and David Ingram. "Nefarious Presentism." *The Philosophical Quarterly* 65, no. 260 (2015): 355-371.

Tallant, Jonathan. "Presentism, Persistence and Trans-temporal Dependence." *Philosophical Studies* 175 (2018): 2214-2216.