

## 0 What motivates presentism?

Prior's first idea: The present is "special." It is not just one region of a bigger region, or one box out of many. It is the only time that exists, period.

Prior's second idea: Time "flows," or "passes."

Broad's idea: The present is like a "moving spotlight."

## 1 The passage of time

Question: In what sense does time "flow"?

Answer 1: In the ordinary sense of "flow."

Answer 2: In the sense that events become further away in the past, or nearer in the future, at a rate of 1s/s etc.

Prior thinks past and future locutions involve adding an adverbs to present-tensed sentences. The background story is this assumption that English *could* have been more "metaphysically perspicuous." That is, its sentences could have been such that they better reflect metaphysical reality (and in our case temporal reality). Take Prior's first pair of examples:

"I will be Xing" → "It will be the case that I am Xing" (future present)

"I was Xing" → "It was the case that I am Xing" (past present)

Prior claims that it is by historical accident that we use the locutions on the left – but their translations on the right are better, as they properly privilege a present tense subsentence (namely, "I am Xing").

The problem of reference for presentists:

- Recall that presentists have a problem providing a referent for sentences like "Socrates was snub-nosed."
- Prior distinguishes individual facts and general facts:
  - Individual facts are about particular things – roughly, they are those that *name* the particular things in question. E.g. "Socrates was snub-nosed."
  - General facts merely describe things – roughly, they don't name them. E.g. "There once was a Greek philosopher who ... and who was snub-nosed."
- In particular, "Socrates was snub-nosed" becomes something like "It was the case that for some specific X, X is called "Socrates," is a Greek philosopher, .... and is snub-nosed."

## 2 The Moving Spotlight View

“We are naturally tempted to regard the history of the world as existing eternally in a certain order of events. Along this, and in a fixed direction, we imagine the characteristic of presentness as moving, somewhat like the spot of light from a policeman’s bull’s-eye traversing the fronts of the houses in a street. What is illuminated is the present, what has been illuminated is the past, and what has not yet been illuminated is the future.” (Broad 141)

The Moving Spotlight View combines eternalism with the idea that there is a privileged time, the present. So although past, present and future times (and objects) all exist, the present is special.

But what is it that makes the present rather than other times “glow”?

## 3 The Growing Block Universe

“[My present] is just the last thin slice that has joined up to my life-history. When it ceases to be present and becomes past this does not mean that it has changed its relations to anything to which it was related when it was present. It will simply mean that other slices have been tacked on to my life-history, and, with their existence, relations have begun to hold, which could not hold before these slices existed to be terms to these relations ... It will be observed that such a theory as this accepts the reality of the present and the past, but holds that the future is simply nothing at all. Nothing has happened to the present by becoming past except that fresh slices of existence have been added to the total history of the world ... A moment  $t$  is later than a moment  $t'$  if the sum total of existence at  $t$  includes the sum total of existence at  $t'$  together with something more.” (Broad 143)

### Growing Block Theory

- Only past and present times (and objects) exist.
- Time passes in virtue of “slices” being added to one end of the block.
- An event is present just in case it does not stand in the “preceding” relation to any other event (or thing).

Benefits of GBT: The future is unreal, time passes and has a direction...

Objection: How do we know whether we exist in the present or not? Consider Caesar in the block thinking to himself, “Here I am in the present.” Whether something is present has nothing to do with the time slice, and everything to do with its extrinsic relations...