

# PRIOR'S PRESENTISM

Ted Sider, Metaphysics

## 1. EXISTENCE VS. "EXISTENCE-IN"

*Some sentences:*

Tables and chairs exist in reality  
In Greek Mythology, Zeus exists  
God exists in the mind  
Unicorns exist in other possible worlds

*Realms*

<u>Reality</u> tables, chairs electrons, us	<u>Greek Mythology</u> Zeuss Titans	<u>The mind</u> God Santa Claus	<u>Other possible worlds</u> unicorns golden mountains
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*The proper understanding of the aforementioned sentences:*

Tables and chairs exist  
According to Greek Mythology, Zeus exists  
Many people believe that God exists  
It might have been the case that unicorns exist

## 2. PRESENTISM

*The B-theorist's reduction of the A-notions:*

WAS(Some dinosaur walks)  $\leftrightarrow$  There exists a dinosaur that walks, which is located before this utterance

WILL(There are human outposts on Mars)  $\leftrightarrow$  There exist human outposts on Mars, located after this utterance

*Sentence operators:* attach to sentences to form complex sentences

**not:** NOT(I am hungry)

**believes:** I BELIEVE(Iverson is the greatest NBA player ever)

**according to:** ACCORDING TO GREEK MYTHOLOGY(Zeus exists)

**possibly:** POSSIBLY(There exist Unicorns)

**was:** WAS(Some dinosaur walks)

**will:** WILL(There are human outposts on Mars)

**Presentism:** Only present objects exist; there are no (merely) future or past objects. The “tense-operators” ‘WILL’ and ‘WAS’ are not definable in terms of B-notions. Time’s passage consists of facts stateable using tense operators. The direction of time consists of the difference between WILL and WAS.

### 3. “THANK GOODNESS THAT’S OVER”

I have a very good friend and colleague in Australia, Professor Smart of Adelaide, with whom I often have arguments about this. He’s an advocate of the tapestry view of time, and says that when we say ‘X is now past’, we just mean ‘The latest part of X is earlier than this utterance.’ But, when at the end of some ordeal I say ‘Thank goodness that’s over’, do I mean ‘Thank goodness the latest part of that is earlier than this utterance’? I certainly do not; I’m not thinking about the utterance at all, it’s the overness, the now-endedness, the pastness of the thing that I’m thankful for, and nothing else (p. 106)

#### *Thank-goodness-that’s-over argument (version 1)*

- (i) If the B-theory is true, then whenever we think thoughts about the past, for example when saying “Thank goodness that’s over”, we’re really thinking about utterances
- (ii) It’s not the case that whenever we think thoughts about the past, we’re really thinking about utterances
- (iii) Therefore, the B-theory is false

**Modified B-theory of tense:** At any time,  $t$ , an utterance at  $t$  of ‘X is past’ means ‘X is earlier than  $t$ ’

*Propositional objects:*

**of belief:** I believe the proposition that I will never win the lottery

**of knowledge:** I know the proposition that my name is Ted

**of desire:** I desire the proposition that I can dunk a basketball

**of relief:** I am relieved that I did not get a speeding ticket

#### *Thank-goodness-that’s-over argument (version 2)*

- (i) If the B-theory is true, then when I say ‘Thank goodness that’s over’, the object of my relief is a B-fact
- (ii) If the object of my relief is a B-fact, then it would have been just as reasonable for me to thank goodness before the ordeal was over
- (iii) It’s not the case that it would have been just as reasonable for me to thank goodness before the ordeal was over
- (iv) Therefore, the B-theory is false