

The Privileged Present:
Defending an “A-Theory” of Time

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Time?

- Newton and Leibniz
- Experience



Nature of Time



Zimmerman Asks...

1. Are there objective differences between what is past, present, and future?
1. Are present events and things somehow more real than those wholly in the past and future?

B-Theorist

- Denies objectivity between past, present, and future
- Focus on relation between events (being earlier than, being later than, being simultaneous with)
- No privilege given to the present, time is indifferent

A-Theorist

- Distinct difference between past, present and future
- Present is more real (accessible, important)
- Future is an open realm of mere possibilities, past is a realm of things that are gone for good



Presentism

- There exist only present events, individuals, and times
- Intuitive to be a presentist

“It is abundantly clear that neither the future nor the past exist, therefore it is not strictly correct to say that there are three times, past, present, and future” (213)



Two other categories of A-theory

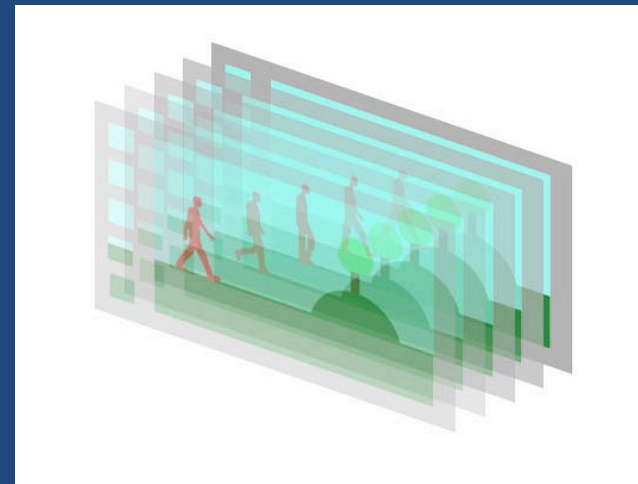
- “Moving Spot Light”

- all temporal moments are equally real, but there is a kind of spotlight that illuminates the present
- time is treated equally



- “Growing Block View”

- the past is just as real as the present, however, the future is not real
- appeal to commonsense



Zimmerman

- Doesn't fully agree with other two models of A-theory
 - Present is the only real time
 - These models give reality to the past (and one to the future)

Weaknesses

- Is intuitive view always correct?
- It is intuitive to think there is some kind of reality in the past
- There are a lot of versions of the A-theory

Objections to A-Theory

Truthmaking

Objection:

“Point to something in the world that makes it true that a dinosaur walked past this place 150,000,000 years ago. It is true, but there is nothing about the way the world is now that requires that it be true or makes it true; and according to you presentists, there is nothing more to the world than the way it is now. So you have no truthmakers for such a straightforward truth about the past” (218)

Response:

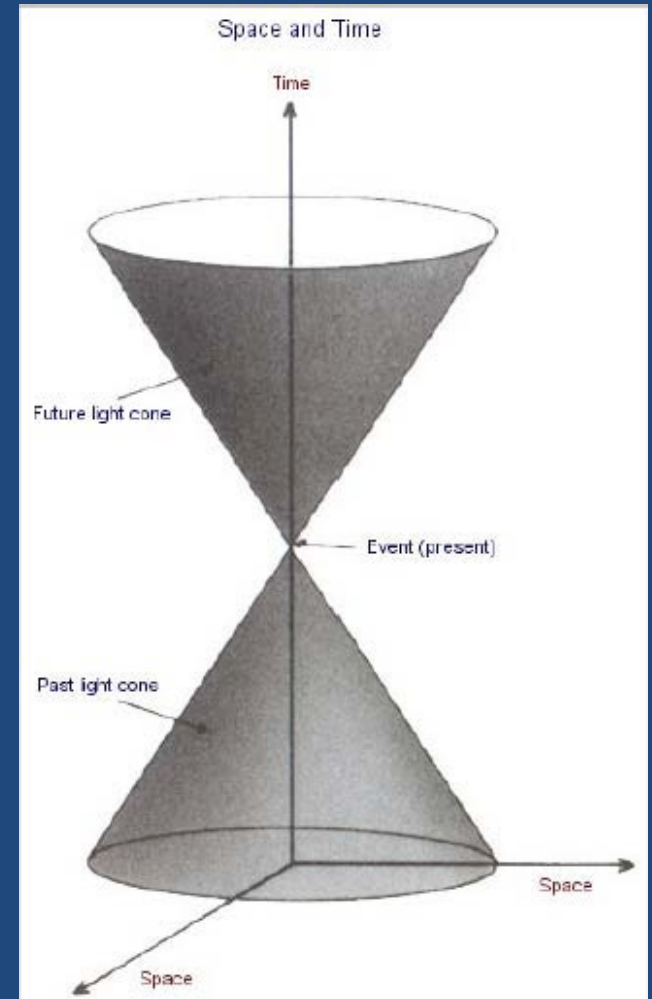
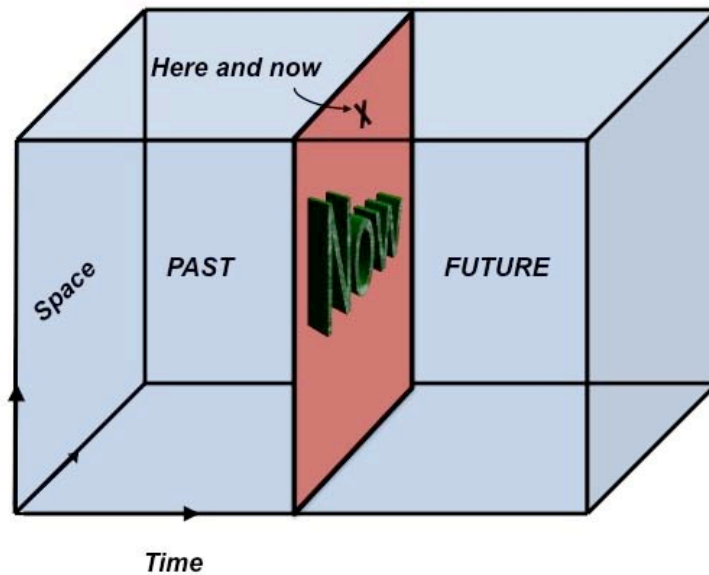
“There are backward-looking properties that objects really have, properties like having been occupied by a dinosaur 150,000,000 years ago...and there are real facts that make propositions about the past true”



Relativity

Einstein's 4-D space-time model

Einstein's Block Universe



Uh-oh

- Presentist says that there only exists one slice of Einstein's 4-D space time
 - With no other slices, the spatiotemporal 4-D structure falls apart
- 4-D structure of space time does not single out, or favor, one set of points as “the time”
 - Does not give preferential treatment to the present

Zimmerman's Conclusions

- It is commonsense to believe the A-theory
- “Innocent until proven guilty”
- Maintains it is reasonable to believe A-theory to be true



Discussion

- Do you side with the A-theory?
- When a philosophical theory goes against one of Einstein's principles, which do you believe?
- Zimmerman ultimately does not maintain the A-theory to be true, rather that it is reasonable to believe it to be true, does that sit well with you?
 - Think about this in regards to reality