

# Can God Only Exist in the Present Moment?

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**Abstract** In this paper, I will argue that presentism is inconsistent with the belief that God exists in time. The defence of my argument will be split into two sections. The first will show that if God exists in time and presentism is true, there are some true propositions about the future. The second will use truthmaker theory to show that these propositions require an existing future entity to be made true. As the first section states that some propositions about the future are true, it is the case that some future entities exist. Hence, if God exists in time then some future entities exist. This conclusion goes directly against presentism's fundamental claim, proving it is inconsistent with the belief that God exists in time.

## 1 Introduction

Presentism is the view that only the present moment and objects within the present moment exist.<sup>1</sup> It is popular because it is a "common sense" approach to visualising time and is consistent with how we experience time, as changing from one moment to the next.<sup>2</sup> The importance of presentism has led to a wide discussion of its conjunction with God's relationship with time. Notable philosophers such as William Lane Craig have stated that God's existence in time (otherwise known as God's temporality) is consistent with presentism.<sup>3</sup> Alan R. Rhoda goes further in arguing that God's existence in time can solve the prominent truthmaker problem for presentism.<sup>4</sup> This paper

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1. Ned Markosian, "A Defence of Presentism," in *Oxford Studies in Metaphysics*; Volume 1, ed. Dean W. Zimmerman (Oxford : Oxford University Press, 2004), 47.

2. Markosian, "A Defence of Presentism," 48.

3. William Lane Craig, *Time and Eternity: Exploring God's Relationship to Time* (Wheaton (IL): Crossway Books, 2001).

4. Alan R. Rhoda, "Presentism, Truthmakers, And God," *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly* 90, no. 1 (2009): 41-62, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-0114.2009.01328.x>.

will show that the belief God exists in time is inconsistent with presentism. Therefore, philosophers should consider the possibility that God exists outside of time, reject truthmaker theory or abandon presentism.

I will present a unique defence which combines God's effect on the future with truthmaker theory. Following this introduction, I will summarise my argument, and its subsequent defence will be divided into sections 3 and 4. In section 3, I will prove the premise that if God exists in time then there are some true propositions about the future. Section 4 will be divided into two sub-sections. In section 4.1, I will use truthmaker theory to show that the propositions discussed in section 3 require an existing future entity to be made true. In section 4.2, I anticipate various objections which attempt to locate truthmakers in the present moment. These objections fail to supply truthmakers for the propositions being discussed because they can only be made true by the existence of the entities that they refer to. As section 3 shows that these propositions are true, it is the case that some future entities exist. Presentists state that future entities do not exist, hence the conclusion of this paper, that the belief that God exists in time is inconsistent with presentism. In other words, God cannot only exist in the present moment.

The rest of this introduction will be used to adapt God's attributes. The God of classical theism is described as an immutable and simple being who exists outside of time for all of eternity. If God exists in time and presentism is true, like every other existing entity which can only exist now, God only exists in the present moment.<sup>5</sup> Consequently, God's traditional attributes, specifically His immutability, omniscience and omnipotence, must be discarded or adapted to function within the confines of presentism.

Firstly, I discard the attribute of immutability. If God is immutable, He is unchanging. If God exists in time and presentism is true, He must change. An outcome of presentism is that propositions truth values change as time changes. For example, in the present moment the proposition 'that I am sitting down' is true. In an hour when I am standing this proposition will be false. God knows it is true in the present moment and will know it is false in the future. God's knowledge changes when propositions change their truth value. Therefore, God changes. I have discussed this attribute because a theist may be reluctant to discard it and argue that its loss is problematic. As it is an unavoidable outcome of God existing in time and presentism being true, I will not raise any objections.

The attribute of omniscience implies that God's knowledge is limitless. In this interpretation, God has experienced the past and is experiencing the present moment. God has knowledge of everything that has occurred in the past and has knowledge of everything that is occurring in the present moment.<sup>6</sup> God's knowledge of the future

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5. Rhoda, "Presentism, Truthmakers, And God," 53.

6. *Ibid.*, 54.

is not as easily defined. It depends upon whether it is believed that the future is undetermined, determined or partly determined. Rhoda's view on the future is unclear. However, he does state that God can anticipate the future.<sup>7</sup> As I expect Rhoda's paper will be used as the main argument against my conclusion, I will maintain that God can anticipate the future.

Lastly, God's omnipotence can be redefined as the attribute of being all powerful within the present moment. God cannot directly act in the past or future because they do not exist. God can only act in the present moment and within the present moment His power is limitless.

## 2 Summary of the Argument

I will argue that presentism is inconsistent with the belief that God exists in time. A summary of my argument is presented below:

1. God exists in time.
2. If God exists in time, He determines the existence of some future entities.
3. Therefore, God determines the existence of some future entities (from 1 & 2).
4. If God determines the existence of some future entities, propositions about those future entities are true.
5. Therefore, some propositions about the future are true (from 3 & 4).
6. A proposition about an entity whose existence is caused by the direct intervention of God is made true by the existence of that entity.
7. If propositions about entities whose existence are caused by the direct intervention of God are true, it entails that those entities exist.
8. Therefore, some future entities exist (from 6 & 7).
9. If any wholly past or merely future entities exist, presentism is false.
10. Therefore, presentism is false.

Presentism is inconsistent with premise (1), the belief that God exists in time. Premise (1) is assumed as true. The defence of the argument will be divided into two sections. Section 3 will defend premises (2) to (5). Section 4 will defend premises (6) to (8). The entities referred to in premises (6) and (7) are defined as 'entities who will exist in the future because of the direct intervention of God in the present moment', this will be abbreviated to E for the rest of this paper.

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7. *Ibid.*, 53.

### 3 Premises (2) - (5)

Premise (2) states that if God exists in time, He determines the existence of some future entities. This section will prove premise (2) and then will explain the steps taken to reach premises (4) to (5). The following scenario explains God's effect on the future, which results in premise (2). God can perform an action X in the present moment. If the purpose of action X is the intended outcome Y, it is the case that Y will occur. In other words, if God performs action X with the intention of Y, Y will happen. The outcome could be the existence of an entity. Hence, God could act in the present moment to bring about the existence of an entity in the future. It should be noted that similar arguments have previously been made. For example, it has been argued that if God wills for a future event to happen then that event will happen.<sup>8</sup> I will now explain, in greater detail, how action X leads to the outcome Y, showing that the existence of some future entities is determined by God's actions in the present moment.

If God performs action X with the intention of effect Y, Y will happen:

- 1\*. God performs action X.
- 2\*. God's sufficient reason for performing action X is the outcome Y.
- 3\*. God has the sufficient reason to act in each moment leading up to Y, to ensure that Y will happen.
- 4\*. God is omniscient and consequently has the knowledge in each moment leading up to Y, to know how to make Y happen.
- 5\*. God is omnipotent and can accordingly directly intervene in each moment leading up to Y, to ensure Y happens.
- 6\*. Therefore, it is the case that the Y will occur (from 3\*, 4\* & 5\* ).

Premises (2\* ) to (3\* ) explain why outcome Y must occur after action X has been performed. Theists maintain that God's actions always have a reason because they would not have faith in a whimsical being. God's sufficient reason for performing action X is Y. Consequently, if Y does not happen then action X would be arbitrary, an unacceptable outcome for theists. For example, if it was argued that after performing X God changed His mind, and brought about an outcome different to Y, it would subsequently have to be admitted that God performed a pointless action. Further actions might be required after X to cause Y, such as stopping future events which could prevent Y. God is unable to directly act in the future from the present moment because

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8. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (N.Y.: Benziger Brothers, 1947).

the future does not exist. Hence, premise (3\*) states that God can act in every moment leading up to Y, to prevent possible events from affecting the existence of Y.

Premises (4\*) and (5\*) both use God's attributes to show how further actions could be carried out to ensure that Y will happen. Premise (4\*) utilizes God's omniscience to demonstrate that in each moment leading up to Y, God knows how to make Y happen. Premise (5\*) refers to the attribute of omnipotence, which is defined as God being all powerful in the present moment. God has the power, in each moment leading up to the outcome, to ensure that the outcome will happen. As a result of premises (2\*) to (5\*), after action X has been performed with the intention of bringing about Y, it is the case that Y will occur.

To summarise, God can perform an action in the present moment which will bring about an outcome in the future. This could be the existence of an entity, thus proving premise (2). If God exists in time, He determines the existence of some future entities, resulting in premise (3), God determines the existence of some future entities. If the existence of some future entities is determined, those entities will exist in a certain way. Propositions which refer to how those entities will exist are true. This leads to premise (4), if God determines the existence of some future entities, propositions about those future entities are true. Premise (5) follows from premise (4), there are some true propositions about the future.

## 4 Premises (6) - (8)

This section has been divided into two sub-sections. Section 4.1 introduces truthmaker theory which is used in premise (6); a proposition about an entity whose existence is caused by the direct intervention of God is made true by the existence of that entity. It will explain the problem that this causes for presentism. Section 4.2 discusses anticipated objections to premise (6). These objections will deny that propositions about E require the existence of E to be made true. The end of this section explains how premise (6) leads to premise (7), which results in premise (8).

### 4.1 Premise (6)

Premise (6) refers to truthmaker theory, which states that true propositions require a truthmaker, something in virtue of which they are true.<sup>9</sup> Propositions which refer to a portion of reality can be made true by a truthmaker, the corresponding part of reality. Hence, the truth of a proposition, by the means of a truthmaker, is grounded

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9. Gonzalo Rodriguez-Pereyra, "Why Truthmakers", in *Truthmakers: The Contemporary Debate*, ed. Julian Dodd (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2005), 17.

in reality.<sup>10</sup> Propositions which do not have a truthmaker are ungrounded, being true or false regardless of reality. Such propositions are avoided in philosophy because they lack justification and do not refer to fact. Truthmaker theory is an evaluative tool used to rule out “dubious ontologies”<sup>11</sup> which are “unwilling to accept an ontology robust enough to bear the weight of the truths [they feel] free to invoke”.<sup>12</sup> If a theory cannot supply truthmakers for propositions which are intuitively true, the theory ‘cheats’ its ontological commitments.

Truthmaker theory challenges presentism’s fundamental claim that the past and future do not exist.<sup>13</sup> Most presentists assert that propositions about the past and future are true. However, they are unable to account for the truth of these propositions because they state that past and future events do not exist. Hence, propositions which are about the past and future lack the existence of a past or future event to make them true. For example, the proposition ‘Julius Caesar existed’ lacks a truthmaker because Julius Caesar does not exist. The proposition is ungrounded which is an unacceptable conclusion for an advocate of truthmaker theory. It is stated in premise (6) that a proposition about E is made true by the existence of E. Presentism is unable to account for the truth of these propositions because E does not exist in the present moment.

The presentist has three options to avoid the truthmaker problem; reject truthmaker theory, deny that there are true propositions about the past and future, or locate a truthmaker in the present moment. I have assumed that truthmaker theory is true, and it has been proved that there are true propositions about the future. Hence presentists are left with the last option; to locate a truthmaker in the present moment. In the following section, I present two theories which have attempted this and adapt them to object against premise (6). If they are successful, propositions about E would not require the existence of E to be made true.

## 4.2 Defending Premise (6)

First objection: Ned Markosian has argued that truthmaker theory does not present a problem against presentism.<sup>14</sup> Truthmakers for propositions about the future are comprised of presently existing objects, their current arrangement, and the laws of nature. To begin with, I summarise Markosian’s argument. This is followed by its adaptation which will object to premise (6). Markosian stated truthmaking theory as the following:

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10. Rodriguez-Pereyra, “Why Truthmakers”, 21.

11. Theodore Sider, “Against Presentism”, in *Four-Dimensionalism: an Ontology of Persistence and Time* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2001), 40.

12. Sider, “Against Presentism”, 41.

13. Ned Markosian, “The Truth About the Past and the Future,” in *Around the Tree: Semantic and Metaphysical Issues Concerning Branching and the Open Future*, ed. Fabrice Correia and Andrea Iacona, vol. 136 (Dordrecht: Springer, 2013), 128. [https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-94-007-5167-5\\_8](https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-94-007-5167-5_8).

14. Markosian, “The Truth About the Past and the Future.”

*The Truthmaker Principle:* For every truth,  $p$ , there exist some things  $x_1, \dots, x_n$ , such that  $p$  is true in virtue of the existence and arrangement of  $x_1, \dots, x_n$ .<sup>15</sup>

Markosian argued that presently existing objects are one component of a truthmaker. They ground propositions about the future in the present moment because they are made from the same matter as future entities. The two other components needed to make a proposition true are the current arrangement of existing objects and the laws of nature. The current arrangement of existing objects will be determined to exist in a certain way by the laws of nature. This is the extent to which true propositions can be made about their future existence. Notably, Markosian argued that the laws of nature are unable to determine the existence of all future entities. In the present moment, the propositions that refer to these entities are false. Hence, all three of the components described above can make some propositions about the future true. Markosian stated that this would work in the following way:

In 1,000 years there will be human outposts on Mars.

The laws of nature will determine the current arrangement of objects to form human outposts on Mars in 1,000 years. Propositions about human outposts on Mars are grounded in the present moment by presently existing objects which will comprise outposts. The proposition 'In 1,000 years there will be human outposts on Mars' is made true by all three components.<sup>16</sup> Markosian's argument could offer a solution to the truthmaker problem for presentists.

For Markosian's argument to object against premise (6), it must be adapted to supply truthmakers for propositions about E. This could state that a proposition about E is made true by presently existing entities, their arrangement and determined existence. The laws of nature can be changed to God's actions in the present moment because they both play the role of determining the existence of some future entities. As explained in section 3, if God acts in the present moment to bring into existence E in the future, the existence of E is determined. After the initial action, there are true propositions about E. The existence of E is also determined by the current arrangement of existing objects. God's decision to bring E into existence depends upon what exists in the present moment. Hence, God's action in the present moment and the current arrangement of objects determines the truth values of propositions about E. Presently existing objects ground propositions about E in the present moment because they will comprise E. All three components make a proposition about E true in the present moment. Hence, the adaptation of Markosian's argument states that propositions about E can be made true by truthmakers which are located in the present moment.

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15. *Ibid.*, 130.

16. *Ibid.*, 131.

This objection fails because presently existing objects are unable to ground propositions about E. Markosian argued that propositions about the future can be grounded by presently existing objects because they are made of the same matter as future objects. However, God can change or create matter without limitations because He is omnipotent. Consequently, E could be made from a different combination of matter or from an entirely new matter. In these scenarios, propositions about the future could not be grounded by presently existing matter. For example, God could commit action X in the present moment, the combining of two colours, which in the future will create a new colour. Once the colour is created, it is possible that it would not resemble any existing colours and could not be made from existing colours. If this were the case, there would not be matter in the present moment which could ground propositions about the new colour. A proposition about the colour would require the future colour to act as a truthmaker and ground the proposition. For this to be the case, the colour would need to exist. Hence, this objection fails because it is possible for E to be made of a different matter than presently existing objects. In this case, presently existing objects would be unable to ground propositions about E. Therefore, it has been shown that Markosian's adaptation does not adequately ground propositions about E in the present moment.

The flaw in Markosian's argument demonstrates that propositions about E can only be made true by the existence of E. God's power is limitless in the present moment. In each second leading up to an outcome, He is able to bend and change matter. The new matter could therefore be entirely different to the matter that existed in the previous present moment. Consequently, only the existence of E can be a truthmaker for propositions about E. So far, premise (6) has been shown to be true; a proposition about E can only be made true by the existence of E.

Second objection: Rhoda has argued that God's existence in time can overcome the truthmaker problem for presentism.<sup>17</sup> God's representational mental states of the past can serve as truthmakers to make propositions about the past true. This argument can be summarised: God remembers the past, experiences the present moment and anticipates the future. As God is omniscient, He accurately remembers His experiences of the past. These memories are concrete representational mental states which can serve as truthmakers for propositions about past events.<sup>18</sup> For example, God remembers how Julius Caesar existed. Accordingly, His memories of how Caesar existed are representational mental states formed from His experiences of Caesar. God's representational mental state of Julius Caesar being assassinated can serve as a truthmaker for the proposition that 'Julius Caesar was assassinated'. Hence, Rhoda has argued that propositions about the past can be made true by God's representational mental states.

Rhoda's argument can be adapted to supply truthmakers for propositions about E.

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17. Rhoda, "Presentism, Truthmakers, And God".

18. Rhoda, "Presentism, Truthmakers, And God", 54.



Propositions about the future can be made true by God's representational mental states of future events. As a result of the attribute of omniscience, God could form representational mental states of what future events would be like based on His experience of viewing the past. As God creates E, He knows how E will exist and accordingly is able to form mental states of E. These mental states could act as truthmakers to make propositions about E true.

The problem with this adaptation is that God's mental states, which do not represent how reality will be, could make false propositions true. God's mental states, whether or not they represent future reality, exist in the same capacity. So far, no reason has been given which could explain why God's mental states which represent the future are able to make propositions true and not so the mental states which do not represent the future. For this adaptation to successfully object against premise (6), only God's mental states which represent how reality will be should be able to make propositions true.

It could be argued that only God's mental states which God knows represent the future can function as truthmakers. If God knows that some of His mental states are inaccurate about the future, He knows that they do not represent any facts about the future. God would be unable to know this by knowing one fact about the future. Rather, God would have knowledge of the relevant facts about the future and could use these facts to infer or deduce which future events are not going to happen. These mental states could be categorised as non-factual states, meaning that they do not represent any facts about the future which are known by God. If God knows that some of His mental states accurately represent the future, He knows the future events which they represent are going to happen. These could be categorised as factual mental states, meaning they represent facts known by God about the future. It could be argued that God's mental states which do not represent the future are unable to function as truthmakers, such that God's non-factual mental states do not represent any facts about the future which are known by God, and consequently are unable to ground propositions about the future in facts. If the future is partly determined, God may not know if some of His mental states represent the future because He would not know if the future events that they represent are going to happen. These would be non-factual mental states because they do not represent any future facts which are known by God and therefore would be inadequate truthmakers. Hence, only God's mental states which He knows represent the future can act as truthmakers. God knows mental states about E are accurate because He knows E will exist. Mental states of E are categorised as factual states. Hence, God's mental states of E could make propositions about E true.

This objection fails because God's foreknowledge does not affect the contents of His representational mental states which makes propositions true. According to the above argument, God's foreknowledge can be used to assess whether His mental states are factual or non-factual. On the other hand, propositions are made true by the contents of God's representational mental states. God knowing that a mental state misrepres-

ents or represents the future does not affect the contents of His mental states. Consider God's mental state of a red flower existing. As God knows a red flower will exist, this mental state is factual. Propositions about a red flower existing can be made true by God's mental state of a red flower. God could also have a mental state of a yellow flower. God could know that there will not be a yellow flower. According to the above argument, propositions about a yellow flower could not be made true by God's mental state of a yellow flower because they do not represent any facts. However, God's knowledge that the first mental state is factual and the second is non-factual does not affect the contents of the mental states in either example. Regardless of this division, the mental states exist in the same capacity. If the first mental state is able to function as a truthmaker, the second mental state should also be a truthmaker. Hence, God's mental states which misrepresent the future should be able to make propositions true. As stated above in the objection, God's mental states which misrepresent the future should not be able to make propositions true because those propositions would be false. Hence, the adaptation of Rhoda's theory fails because it allows for false propositions to be made true by God's mental states.

To summarise section 4.2, the objections above fail because they do not demonstrate that propositions about E can be made true by anything other than the existence of E. The adaptation of Markosian's theory is unsuccessful because presently existing objects are unable to ground propositions about E. The adaptation of Rhoda's theory fails because it allows for false propositions to be made true. Moreover, Markosian's objection shows that only the existence of E can serve as a truthmaker for propositions about E. Hence, premise (6) is proved to be true; a proposition about E can only be made true by the existence of E.

Premise (7) states that if propositions about E are true, it entails that E exists. Section 3 has proved that propositions about E are true. It has been shown that propositions about E can only be made true by the existence of E. It follows that E exists. Consequently, premise (8) is true; some future entities exist. This is inconsistent with presentism as it states only presently existing entities exist. Therefore, presentism is inconsistent with the belief that God exists in time.

## 5 Conclusion

This paper has shown that the belief that God exists in time is inconsistent with presentism. In section 3, premise (2) was proved by the argument that if God performs action X with the intention of effect Y, Y will happen. Premises (4) and (5) followed which led to the conclusion, if God exists in time, there are true propositions about the future. This should be relatively uncontroversial as Aquinas has produced a similar and well-

established argument.<sup>19</sup> Furthermore, it has been clearly explained how this argument works within the framework of presentism. This led to section 4 which explained and defended premises (6) to (8). Section 4.1 introduced truthmaker theory which is used in premise (6). I have assumed that truthmaker theory is true as it is generally accepted by both presentists and non-presentists. To overcome the truthmaker problem, presentists must locate truthmakers for propositions about the future in the present moment. In section 4.2, I explained how presentists might attempt to do this for propositions about E. I have dedicated a large amount of this paper to explaining and rejecting these objections because I expect that they will be used as the main argument against my conclusion. I conclude in section 4.2 that propositions about E can only be made true by the existence of E. The last part of section 4 explained premise (7); if propositions about entities whose existence is caused by the direct intervention of God are true, it entails that those entities exist. This resulted in premise (8); some future entities exist. Hence, if God exists in time then future entities exist. Presentism states that only presently existing objects exist. Therefore, this paper has shown that presentism is inconsistent with the belief that God exists in time. In other words, God cannot only exist in the present moment.

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19. Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*.

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