Ostrich Presentism
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Abstract
Ostrich presentists maintain that we can use all the expressive resources of the tensed language to provide an explanation of why true claims about the past are true, without thereby paying any price in terms of ontology or basic ideology. I clarify the position by making a distinction between three kinds of explanation, which has general interest and applicability. I then criticize the ostrich position because it requires an unconstrained version of the third form of explanation, which is out of place in metaphysics.

Introduction

There are — or so it seems — many true past tensed existence claims (TptECs), for instance:

(1) Dinosaurs existed

Notoriously, explaining their truth — i.e. providing a truth explanation of TptECs — is a predicament for the presentist. Many presentist versions of truth explanations for TptECs have been proposed in the literature. For instance, some presentists have appealed to uninstantiated Haecceities of past objects, and others to the present instantiation of "Lucretian" properties such as *being such that dinosaurs existed*. On the one hand, those explanations make reference only to the present, and are thus acceptable to a presentist view. On the other, they all seem to inflate either the ontology or the ideology of the presentist with elements that the eternalist can do without. More recently, certain philosophers have argued that the presentist can formulate truth explanations for TptECs without paying any inflationary price. In what follows, I discuss and criticize this position, which I call *ostrich presentism*. In §I, I introduce the problem of providing a ground for TptECs and distinguish it from the related problem of the ontological commitment (which is much less worrisome for the presentist). In §II, I discuss some of the inflationary solutions that presentists have proposed, and compare them with the ostrich proposal. In §III, I propose an analysis of three kinds of explanation and maintain that the ostrich is committed to an unrestricted version of the third kind — *unrestricted plain explanation*. In §IV, I defend the idea that unrestricted plain explanations are unacceptable. In the final section, §V, I discuss a kind of restricted plain explanation concerning negative existential claims, which the eternalist too can accept, and argue against the idea that a justification for endorsing such a position can be transferred to the ostrich presentist case.

I The Troubles of Parsimony: commitment and grounding

The dispute between eternalism and presentism is a dispute in ontology. This is the kernel of the disagreement: according to the presentist, only present entities exist; according to the eternalist, past and future entities also exist. As in many other areas of metaphysics, reasons to prefer either presentism or eternalism must come from their theoretical virtues. One purported virtue that presentism comparatively has is *ontological parsimony*. Roughly, the rationale for maintaining that the presentist's ontology is leaner than the eternalist's is the following. A presentist could in principle accept any existential claim about presently existing entities that the eternalist accepts, but

she cannot accept any of the existential claims about past entities that the eternalist accepts. In other words, while both the eternalist and the presentist are committed to present entities, only the eternalist is committed, *in addition*, to past entities. Thus, presentism is more ontologically parsimonious than eternalism, at least at the quantitative level [1].

The denial of past entities raises at least two problems for the presentist [2]. Although the problems are related, it is important to distinguish between them, since one is a red herring that the presentist can easily solve, while the other is a serious challenge that requires the presentist to pay a non-trivial price. The first problem is a version of Plato's beard, and I will call it *the ontological commitment problem*. In both scientific and ordinary contexts, we talk about[3] past things, and thereby sometimes make true claims. In particular, we make true past-tensed claims that are about the existence of various things, namely true past tense existential claims (TptECs), such as (1), or other claims that imply them (such as "Dinosaurs roamed the Earth").

(1) Dinosaurs existed

Now, if (1) is about the existence of dinosaurs in the sense that it quantifies over dinosaurs, according to the Quinean motto, it thereby commits whoever endorses it to the existence of dinosaurs. It does not commit whoever endorses it to the possibility of encountering dinosaurs in her own experience (barring time travel scenarios), but it does commit her to having dinosaurs in her domain of quantification, namely to their "simple existence"[4]. Eternalists, whose ontology encompasses past entities, are happy to paraphrase (1) as (1') and make their ontological commitments to dinosaurs explicit.

(1') Dinosaurs exist, and they are located in the past

(Namely: there exists something that is a dinosaur and it is located in the past).[5] Presentists cannot accept (1') as a paraphrase of (1), since otherwise they would be committed to dinosaurs. The

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[1] While *qualitative* parsimony is almost universally acknowledged as a theoretical virtue, *quantitative* parsimony is sometimes regarded with suspect. I will not question here the point that quantitative parsimony is a theoretical virtue, neither will I pursue the issue whether presentism is also qualitatively more parsimonious in some interesting sense. Quantitative parsimony, in connection with presentism, has been advocated as a virtue by Bourne 2005: 68 and Tallant *forthcoming* a.

[2] I leave aside here the problem of singular propositions about past objects and the problem of relations between present and past objects (see Davidson 2003, Keller 2004, and Torrengo 2010). Both problems are clearly related to the two mentioned in the text, but they raise further complications that are immaterial to my main point.

[3] I am using the locution "to be about" for interpreted sentences without proper names or indexical as follows: in order for a statement *p* to be about X's, and to be about property (being an) X, it is sufficient that *p* contains the predicate X.

[4] The distinction between eternalism and presentism can be stated in terms of this notion of "simple existence" or "existing *simpliciter*"; cf. Sider 2006; Sider 2011: 242-45; Crisp 2003; and Torrengo 2012. An alternative is to resort to the tense-logical "it is always the case" operator and formulating the distinction as a disagreement over the claim that "it is always the case that only what is present exists" (see Correia & Rosenkranz 2011, Markosian 2004). A further alternative is presented in Tallant *forthcoming* b. Endorsing such alternatives would require a certain reformulation of what follows. I do not consider here the possibility of defining presentism in terms of ontological priority (see Baron 2013: 16, and López de Da, *ms.*).

[5] Slightly more formally:

$(1'^{F})$ $(\exists x)$ (Dinosaur(x) & Located-in-the-past (x))

Typically, the eternalist will also endorse a tenseless view of reality, and thus she will not consider "Located-in-the-past" to express a tensed property, but rather to express a tenseless relation between the time of utterance of a claim and some (possibly different) time. (Alternatively, she will consider tensed properties as less fundamental than tenseless relations, and reduce them to the latter). A more apt paraphrase for the tenseless variety of eternalism is the following

$(1'^{F}{*})$ $(\exists x, t, t0)$ (Dinosaur(x) & Located-at (x, t) & t0<t)

ontological commitment problem facing presentists is to provide a paraphrase of (1) that does not commit them to the existence of dinosaurs. The presentist argues that accepting a claim in which a quantifier is embedded in a *past tense operator* does not commit us to the entities over which the quantifier ranges. Thus she paraphrases (1) not as (1'), but as (1") below.

(1") It was the case that dinosaurs exist

Namely, she considers the quantification over dinosaurs as embedded in a past tense sentential operator[6]. Given the way tense operators work, presentists have no problem at all in accepting sentences about past things and believing them to be true. What *is* a problem for presentism is to *explain* why true claims about the past are true, in particular why TptEcs are true — namely to provide an answer to (Q-gen) and its exemplifications, such as (Q) below.

(Q-gen) Why are TptECs true?

(Q) Why is (1) true?

Barring niceties, it is straightforward to see how eternalist will answer. What explains the truth of (1) is the existence of dinosaurs, together with the latter's position in time. In other words, it is true that there were dinosaurs, because it is true that there are dinosaurs, and they are located in the past. In contrast, the presentist cannot explain the truth of (1) in terms of the simple existence of dinosaurs, and more generally she cannot appeal to past entities to explain the truth of TptECs. I will call this problem for presentism the *grounding problem* (with respect to TptECs).

II Eliminativism, Reductionism and Ostrich Presentism

How can a presentist solve the grounding problem? As we have seen, her predicament does not lie in accepting TptECs, since TptECs do not commit to the existence of past entities. Rather, it lies in providing an explanation of why they are true, which — unlike the one provided by the eternalist — does not commit the presentist to non-present entities. Two strategies come to mind: *eliminativism,* and *reductionism*. The presentist who endorses an *eliminativist* strategy would agree with the eternalist that the truth of TptECs is explained by reference to past entities and their position in time. However, the eliminativist denies that there are any TptECs. Each claim about the past is thus either false or indeterminate. Few have found this strategy palatable, and in what follows I will not consider it[7].

The presentist who endorses a *reductionist* strategy and the eternalist agree that there are TptECs such as (1), but they disagree on what makes TptECs true: according to reductionist presentism,

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(Where t0 is the time of utterance, and > is the tenseless relation of *being later than*.) Here I am assuming that both the eternalist and the presentist accept a *tensed* view of time, in order to reduce the "noise" from further differences between the two positions that are irrelevant to the *ontological* distinction on which I am focusing.
[6] Slightly more formally:

(1"$^\mathbf{F}$) WAS (($\exists$x) (Dinosaur(x)))

Where "WAS" is the sentential past tense operator.
[7] As the seminal article by Dummett (1969) made clear long ago. For the specific problem of eliminativism, see Bourne (2006: 40-41) and Parsons (2005); see also Dolev (2007). An alternative to eliminativism is the "quasi-truth" solution advanced by Sider (1999), who does not endorse it, and by Markosian (2004), who endorsed it at the time. However, quasi-truth is advanced as a solution for the problems of singular propositions and cross-temporal relations (see note 2), and it works only (if it works at all) if the problem of the ground of general propositions about the past — such as the one expressed by (1) — is solved. Probably the best option for the eliminativist is to embrace an error theory, see Daily and Liggins (2010). In what follows I will no longer consider eliminativism.

TptECs are made true by *presently existing entities and the properties that they presently instantiate*. There are various presentist answers that share this feature (I call them all "reductionist" for the sake of brevity, although in certain cases this may sound slightly strange). The existence of the entities to which the reductionist appeals in order to ground TptECs is unproblematic for the presentist, because they exist in the present. However, at least two kinds of problem may arise, depending on whether the reductionist is of the *minimalist* kind or of the *inflationary* kind. The minimalist appeals to the laws of nature in order to ground truths about the past on presently existing entities of an ordinary and unproblematic kind[8]. The main problem with this view is that it is implausible that she can explain all past truths with such minimal resources. In what follows I will mostly ignore the minimalist option.

The inflationary reductionist introduces *sui generis* entities or properties to explain past truths. Examples of *inflationary reductionist* varieties of presentism are the *Haecceitist* version, which grounds the truth of TptECs in the present existence of uninstantiated "thisness"[9], and the *Lucretian* version, which takes the present world to exemplify primitive, unstructured properties and consider them as grounds for TptECs and truths about the past in general[10]. The problem with this strategy is obvious. Inflationary reductionism requires either individuals, which presumably won't show up in the eternalist inventory of the world, or a primitive ideology (i.e. fundamental properties), which the eternalist can do without (or treat as derivative). Given that one of the main reasons for endorsing presentism is its alleged parsimony, endorsing an inflationary solution to the grounding problem may turn out to be dialectically a very poor move.

And, what is worse, it is not clear that paying this extra price will do us any good. Consider Lucretian presentism as an example. The Lucretian answers (Q) by claiming that (1) is true because something along the line of (LA) holds.

(1) Dinosaurs existed
(Q) Why (1) is true?
(LA) The world instantiates *being such that dinosaurs existed*

By introducing the irreducibly past tensed property *being such that dinosaurs existed* in her ideology, the Lucretian provides a presentism-friendly explanation of the truth of (1). Now, let us put aside for a moment the costs of ideology or ontology that the inflationary presentist faces. Every reductionist approach points at something *present* in order to explain truths about the *past* (that is, past-tensed present truths). In this respect, they all have an explanatory deficit (*ceteris paribus*) in comparison with any explanation that appeals to the past, such as the eternalist's explanation. A constraint that it seems reasonable to place on *any* explanation about the truth of TptECs is that it is the past that makes true claims about the *past* true, not the present[11]. A criticism of reductionist presentism that appeals to such a principle can surely be endorsed by an eternalist, but certain recent presentists have also recently raised it, arguing that truth explanations of TptECs do not compel

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[8] See Ludlow (1999), Dainton (2001), and Markosian (2013). Markosian allows that if the laws of physics are indeterministic, certain propositions about the past which an eternalist would regard as true may lack true value. Thus, the position is in part eliminativist.
[9] Adams (1986).
[10] Bigelow (1996). Other versions that are problematic in this sense have dispositional (Parsons 2005) and distributional (Cameron 2011) properties as grounds. *Ersatz* grounds are also a case at issue (Bourne 2006, and Crisp 2007); however, a discussion of *ersatzer* presentism lies beyond the scope of this paper.
[11] This may be seen as an application of what Merricks (2007) calls "the relevance constraint", even though he applies it only with respect to truth-maker theories, and not in general to the grounding (see §III). See also the "tracking assumption" of Baron (*forthcoming*).

them to any extra metaphysical costs. The *ostrich presentist*[12]*,* as I will call her, appeals to (1'') as the explanans of the truth of (1).

(1'') It was the case that dinosaurs exist

If we think of the linguistic resources that help presentists (of any sort) to solve the ontological commitment problem, it is not difficult to see what the strategy of the ostrich presentist is. Past tensed operators are devices to talk about *the past*, regardless of the fact that according to the presentist the past does not exist. There are many linguistic devices that allow one to accept certain claims, without being committed to what those claims are about. For instance, if I accept that it is *not* the case that Arctic penguins exist, it does not follow that I am committed to the existence of Arctic penguins (quite the contrary!). Negation (at least as sentential operator) allows me to accept claims that are about Arctic penguins, without thereby being committed to them. Modal operators and the "according to the fiction S" operator provide further examples. If such a way of speaking is taken as primitive and irreducible, the price to pay is no longer a commitment to an extra ontology or to bits of substantial metaphysical theses, but rather "a [commitment] to a kind of irreducible hypothetical explanation. An explanation that "points beyond" what there is and what properties and relations things instantiate" (Sanson and Caplan 2010: 34). And in so far as endorsing such a commitment with respect to tensed truths allows the presentist to have a theory that is more parsimonious than eternalism but possesses as much explanatory power with respect to instantiations of (Q-gen), the price may be well worth paying. In what follows I will argue that the ostrich's way out is not open to the presentist.

III Three Kinds of Explanation

One may be tempted to justify the ostrich's position on the grounds that refusing to accept irreducible tensed explanations for the truth of TptECs is tantamount to requiring truthmakers for such claims, and then arguing that the latter request is unmotivated. This strategy is bound to fail for two related reasons. Firstly, the problem of providing an explanation of the truth of TptECs is distinct not only from the ontological commitment problem for TptECs, but also from the problem of *providing truthmakers* for TptECs. Thus, even if the presentist gets rid of the latter, she still has to face the former. With respect to (1), the truthmaker problem boils down to answering (TMQ), rather than (Q).

(TMQ) What makes (1) true?
(Q) Why is (1) true?

In order to answer (TMQ), we need to find an entity[13] which bears the *truthmaking relation* to (1). How to characterize the truthmaking relation is a matter of debate. Apart from its formal relations, such as irreflexivity and asymmetry, an important aspect of the debate concerns whether we should take the truthmaking relation as explanatory — namely, if we require as a necessary condition for the holding of the truth-making relation that the truthmaker of p explains the truth of p. If the truthmaking relation has nothing to do with the explanation, there is no doubt that the grounding problem and the truthmaking problem come apart. However, most truthmaker theorists maintain

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[12] See Sanson *ms.*, Tallant (2009b), Merricks (2007), and Sanson and Caplan (2010) who make a similar point about tensed determinations. Tallant (2009b) generalizes the strategy to at least the modal case. See also the criticism in Krämer (2010), and the reply in Tallant (2010a). Kierland and Monton (2007) have a position that seems to be in between the reductionist one and the ostrich one: they maintain that presentists can explain truth about the past in so far as they take "the past" to be a genuine determination of the present world.

[13] Or a plurality of entities (see Dasgupta *ms.*), but for simplicity of exposition I will focus on the singular case.

that there is an explanatory tie between the truthmaker and the truthbearer[14]. I will characterize this tie by means of the relation of "in virtue of" as follows:

(TM-def) For every true proposition p, x makes p true (i.e. bear the truthmaking relation to p) iff p is true in virtue of the existence of x

We can therefore rephrase the truthmaker problem with respect to (1) as the challenge for the presentist to answer (TMQ').

(TMQ') What is the x such that (1) is true in virtue of the existence of x?

If the truthmaking relation is explanatory, there is a link between (TMQ) and (Q): every answer to the former can be transformed into an answer to the latter (but not the other way around). More precisely, any answer to (TMQ') of the form "The x such that..." can be transformed into an answer to (Q) of the form "Because there exists an x such that ....", where x is the truthmaker of (1). I will call any true answer to an instance of (Q) that is also a true answer to the corresponding instance of (TMQ') a *strict ontological explanation*.

The presentist who rejects the thesis that TptECs have truthmakers is rejecting the idea that an answer to (Q) should be a strict ontological explanation[15]. That truth explanations are strict ontological explanations follows from the principle of truthmaker maximalism (TM-max) – the thesis that every truth has a truthmaker, that is, it has an entity in virtue of whose existence it is true.

(TM-max) For every true proposition p, there exists an x such that p is true in virtue of the existence of x

Although some have argued that (TM-max) captures a fundamental intuition about truth[16], many see it as too strong[17]. If this is so, there is no reason to accept it as a constraint on admissible truth explanations, and the presentist can try to formulate an explanation of the truth of TptECs that does not require her to accept truthmakers for TptECs[18].

However, rejecting (TM-max) as a constraint on admissible truth explanations is compatible with accepting some other weaker constraint on (Q), which is both independently plausible, and still problematic for the presentist. This is the second reason why dropping the requirement of having truthmakers for TptECs does not by itself justify the adoption of irreducible tensed explanations.

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[14] See Correia *forthcoming*, Cameron *forthcoming* a, Fine 2012. Armstrong seems to think that *necessitation* is at least as important as explanatory relevance: "*p* (a proposition) is true if and only if there exists a T (some entity in the world) such that T necessitates that *p* and *p* is true in virtue of T" (Armstrong 2004:17). Although in what follows I will use the "in virtue of" locution as expressing an explanatory link, I am aware that not all philosophers agree, cf. Liggins 2012 (and also Schaffer 2009 is cautious on this point). For a reading of "in virtue of" and "grounding" as expressing explanatory link in an "objective" sense, see Audi 2012.

[15] Is answering (TMQ') utterly trivial for the eternalist? Armstrong seems to think so: "What truthmaker can be provided for the truth <Caesar existed>? The obvious truthmaker, at least, is Caesar himself" (Armstrong 2004: 146). However, notice that at least within a tensed framework, it does not seem that past entities *per se* would do the job; we also need tensed facts concerning their temporal location. Consider again (1): while dinosaurs can be seen as the truthmakers for the claim that "Dinosaurs exist (*simpliciter*)" (which the eternalists consider true in its unrestricted reading), there is nothing in the fact that dinosaurs exist simpliciter that would make it the case that they existed (in the past). If the eternalist takes tensed properties as genuine, she needs to acknowledge tensed facts as truthmakers of TptECs. That is not to say that the eternalist is no better off than the presentist, even within a tensed framework. Indeed, she has the advantage of having to expand neither her ontology nor her basic ideology in order to provide constituents of the facts or states of affairs that ground TptECs. But she still has to admit those facts as further entities.

[16] Cf. Armstrong 1997; Rodriguez-Pereyra 2005.

[17] See, for instance, Lewis 2001 and MacBride 2005.

[18] Tallant 2009a.

Even if we think that exceptions to (TM-max) are justified, we may still think that *truth cannot float free of any constraints from reality*. After all, truth-bearers are representational entities, and if we find appealing the idea that whether they are true or not depends not only on how truth-bearers represent reality but also on how reality is, this should be regardless of the *kind* of representation that we are dealing with (including representations that are negative, tensed, perspectival, hypothetical, categorical or what have you).

If this line of thought is sound, we should look for a principle that captures the idea that *any* true claim depends on reality, even when it lacks a truthmaker. Following Lewis (1992, 2001), I will frame this "grounding intuition" in terms of the supervenience of truth on being:

(GI) Any two worlds that differ with respect to what claims are true must also differ with respect to what exists and what genuine properties are instantiated by what exists[19]

The grounding intuition supports the claim that there cannot be *unrestricted ungrounded truths*. Let us call a claim *p* that is true in a world *w* an *ungrounded truth* (in *w*) if (i) it is a *brute* truth (i.e. there is no non-circular explanation of why it is true), and (ii) the entities and properties that *p* is about do not exist and are not genuine (respectively) in *w*. An unrestricted ungrounded truth is an ungrounded truth that is not restricted by (GI). According to (GI), brute truths unsupported by ontology and ideology cannot be accepted in so far as we are not ruling out worlds that differ in terms of truth but not in terms of what exists and in what properties the existents instantiate. This amounts to the triviality that if the ungrounded truths that we accept are constrained in a way that (GI) is not violated, accepting them does not constitute a violation of (GI). However, it is prima facie hard to see what could motivate such a restriction, other than an appeal to the idea that truth should be grounded in reality, which is precisely the idea that the acceptance of ungrounded truth clashes with. Therefore, *in so far as such restrictions would be arbitrary*, (GI) strongly suggests that ungrounded truths should not in general be accepted (more on this below in §V).

If this is so, explanations of the form "p because q", where q is an ungrounded truth, cannot be accepted either (assuming that "because" is factive with respect to the explanans position). A presentist who accepts ungrounded past tensed truths as explanans in truth explanation violates (GI), since she cannot rule out the possibility that two worlds might differ with respect to past truths, while sharing all their ontology and basic ideology. Thus, (GI) puts a constraint on the admissibility of truth explanations available to the presentist: explanations that do not appeal to what one accepts in her ontology and basic ideology are ruled out, because if we accepted them it would always be possible that two worlds that share the same ontology and the same patterns of instantiation of genuine property may differ in what is true — since what explains the truths in question is independent of what exists and how the existents behave.

I will call an explanation that makes reference only to the ontology and the ideology of the accepted substantial metaphysical doctrine, namely one that does not accept ungrounded truths as explanans, a *metaphysical explanation*, and I will call an explanation that does not comply with the constraint that ungrounded truths cannot be explanans a *plain explanation*[20]. Someone who thinks that truth explanations must be metaphysical explanations (while failing to be strict ontological explanations)

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[19] How to spell out the idea of "genuine property" is a notoriously difficult question. Lewis 1986 talks of "perfectly natural properties", Fine 2001 of "real properties", and Sider 2011 of "joint carving properties". Luckily, we do not need to enter into the details. What we need is some way or other to distinguish between the properties that emerge in the substantial metaphysical doctrine that we accept (those expressed by its primitive predicates), and those that do not. (GI) is about the former.

[20] An obvious proviso: even in the case of plain explanation, an explanation that *commits* whoever endorses it to the existence of entities that she does not accept is not allowed; but since we have granted that past tensed existential claims do not ontologically commit to past entities, the proviso is trivially met by the ostrich presentist.

complies with (GI) and the idea that explanations of truth do not come cost-free[21]. Ostrich presentism is incompatible not only with truthmaker maximalism and the requirement that truth explanations be strict ontological explanations, but also with (GI) and the requirement that truth explanations be metaphysical explanations. By taking (1''), repeated below, as a brute truth, the ostrich is accepting that there are brute truths that are not existential truths[22].

(1'') It was the case that dinosaurs exist

Besides, by taking (1'') as ungrounded, the ostrich presentist refuses to comply not only with (TM-max), but with (GI) as well[23]. An inflationary presentist who rejects (TM-max), but still complies with (GI), does not accept that there must be facts (or states of affairs, or tropes) that are truthmakers for TptECs, but she still provides a metaphysical explanation of why TptECs are true — one that is *not* compatible with the position of someone who rejects the inflationary position. For instance, the Lucretian's answer (LA) is compatible with the denial of (TM-max), but *not* with a metaphysics that does not regard properties such as *being such that there were dinosaurs* as genuine.

(LA) The world instantiates *being such that there were dinosaurs*

In contrast, the ostrich presentist takes (1'') to be compatible with the denial of any form of inflationary presentism. Thus, two worlds that do not differ with respect to what exists and what genuine properties are instantiated by what exists can differ with respect to what propositions are true, and (GI) must be false. In so far as (GI) expresses a principle that any truth explanation should respect, presentists cannot take the ostrich option.

IV Why Keep the Present after all?

Now, although (GI) entails a weaker constraint on truth explanation than having strict ontological explanations for every truth, it may be argued that it is not sacrosanct and can be rejected. Merricks 2007, for instance, argues against the idea that every truth requires a ground in reality. Sanson and Caplan (2010), and Sanson *ms.* have argued that past tensed predications are exceptions to (GI); Tallant (2009b, 2010a), while arguing explicitly against the stronger (TM-max), has provided arguments that touch on (GI) as well.

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[21] Although, of course, if a philosopher appeals to some entities and properties that she already accepts, she will provide a "contextually cost-free" metaphysical explanation.

[22] And, thus, she is denying (TM-max). This is clear if we consider Cameron's (*forthcoming* a) characterization of truthmaker maximalism as the tenet that "brute truths are a subset of the pure existence claims, and every true proposition is either brute or is true in virtue of some brute proposition" (section 4). Remember that a past tensed existential truth is *not* an existential truth, neither does it entail one, since the existential quantifier, once embedded in a past tense operator is no longer ontologically committal. (The same holds for so-called "negative existentials"; they are not existential claims). Existential claims are those whose main operator (the one with the largest scope) is an existential quantifier.

[23] As I am characterizing it, ostrich presentism has similarities with other "deflationist" or "non-serious" versions of presentism; see (Prior 1960), Craig (2003) and Hudson (1997). Hinchliff (1996) is presented by Brogaard (2006), Keller (2004), and Davidson (2003) as a Meinongian, but as a deflationist (or "frivolous") presentist by Markosian (2004). Especially in the light of his Hinchliff 2010, I think he is better classified as a deflationist presentist. Here I want to make a point not of exegesis, but of theoretical difference. Meinongians (Reicher 2006) accept non-existent objects in their ontology; deflationists claim that an object *x* does not need to exist or be in order for *x* to instantiate a property P. Do they claim that they can thus also explain why certain attributions of P to *x* are true? I think that in the past the debate was not focused on the grounding problem, and so this point is not clear. However, present-day ostrich presentists clearly state so.

One reason why metaphysicians appeal to (GI) is that it is useful for contrasting with positions that "cheat". The idea behind the charge of "cheating" is that there must be internal coherence between what one posits in one's metaphysics and what one uses when presenting arguments and providing explanations in pursuing a theoretical enquiry. In the literature, we find discussions of two kinds of cheating[24]. The first is the insertion of objects or properties into one's metaphysics that are of the "wrong" kind to be fundamental, because they have a *hypothetical nature*, and should be reduced to more categorical objects and properties. The second is cheating by accepting unconstrained ungrounded truths as explanans. With respect to the grounding problem, we can label the two kinds of cheating as follows:

(a) hypothetical ground
(b) no-ground

Certain reductionist forms of presentism have been charged with cheating of the first kind, but I will not be concerned with this issue here[25]. Even if cheating of type (a) is bad, it is not because it contradicts (GI). Explanations of truth that appeal to hypothetical entities or properties are still metaphysical explanations. If they are bad explanations, it is not because they terminate in ungrounded truths.

In contrast, the ostrich presentist rejects not only (TM-max) and the request of a strictly ontological explanation for the truth of TptECs, but also (GI) and the idea that truth supervenes on being. Presentists have two conjoint reasons to be tempted by the ostrich position: on the one hand, to maintain ontological and ideological parsimony, and on the other hand, not to give up explanatory power. Can the presentist have both advantages at the same time?

What is accepted in the basic ontology and ideology of a theory often stands in a complementary relation with respect to the *explanatory power* of the theory, namely its capacity to support hypotheses that explain points at stake. Consider the following example. Imagine a metaphysician endorsing the "no-table view", according to which (i) tables do not exist, and (ii) ordinary objects of other kinds exist. The no-table view is more parsimonious than the "ordinary view", according to which all kinds of ordinary objects exist. However, being more parsimonious is a benefit for the "no-table view" only in so far as it is not outweighed by the cost of a loss in explanatory power. And it is quite likely that there are explanations at stake — e.g. concerning our experiences of tables, and prima facie true claims about them — with respect to which the "no-table view" *by itself* cannot do as much work as the ordinary view[26]. Such a tradeoff between ontological parsimony, ideological parsimony, and explanatory power is a common pattern in metaphysical debates[27]. Ontological parsimony cannot be *per se* a virtue. In general, the benefits that a view gains from

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[24] A similar though is in Tallant 2009a, from which I take the expression "no-ground" cheating.

[25] See Sider 2001: 39-41, who argues against the Lucretian variety of presentism. Distributional properties have also been charged with being hypothetical (see Tallant and Ingram 2012 and the reply by Cameron *forthcoming* b). Note that even if cheaters of kind (a) could defend their position either by providing an articulated explanation of how the grounding takes place (see Crisp 2007, who defends Lucretian presentism along those lines) or by insisting that the properties she is appealing to are not of the "wrong" kind (see Parsons 2004), such defenses cannot be endorsed with respect to cheaters of kind (b).

[26] As an example from the contemporary literature, consider van Inwagen's view that live organisms exist, while ordinary objects do not, and that ordinary existential claims about the latter are false. The view can be considered to be preferable because it is more parsimonious only in so far as it can explain why many claims about ordinary objects seem to be true nonetheless. van Inwagen 1990; Merricks 2001.

[27] The tradeoff is often depicted as being between ontological parsimony and ideological complexity. I think that is a misleading way of putting it. Increasing ideological complexity means adding a primitive ideology (or a doctrine of some sort); this is not just a matter of increasing conceptual complexity, but entails substantial metaphysical costs (see Sider 2011: 12; and Krämer 2010; see also Pickel & Mantegani 2012). For instance, if a defender of the "no-table view" introduces primitive properties in her theory to explain facts about "table experiences", the ideology that she endorses will be less parsimonious than that of the ordinary view.

being more parsimonious than a rival one (as for those coming from any other theoretical virtue) have to be gauged against the amount of *theoretical work* that the view is able to do.

Compare now the "no-table" view with presentism. The "no-table" view is more parsimonious than the rival "ordinary view" according to which not only chairs, forks, bottles and so on exist, but also tables. However, it is not *clearly* preferable to the ordinary view because it is not clear whether its parsimony should count as a benefit, given that it seems to lead to an explanatory deficit. The presentist is in an analogous position with respect to the eternalist; her ontology is more parsimonious, given that it does not encompass past entities, but it is not clearly preferable to the eternalist's, given that she does not have a straightforward truth explanation of TptECs. To push the analogy further, let us now consider truth explanations of true claims about tables such as (2) below.

(2) There are tables

The "ordinary view" can provide a truth explanation of (2) by appealing to tables, without increasing either its ontology or its ideology. In contrast, the "no-table view" has no such straightforward explanation of why (2) is true. As there are three varieties of answer that the presentist can give to the grounding problem — the eliminativist, the reductionist, and the ostrich variety — the same goes for the "no-table view" with respect to the problem of providing a truth explanation of (2). An eliminativist "no-table view" supporter will deny that there is actually a problem to start with, since (2) does entail a commitment to tables, and it is thereby false. (Of course, she will have the further problem of accounting for the fact that ordinary intuitions are mistaken here.) A reductionist "no-table view" supporter will accept the truth of (2), but deny that a metaphysical explanation of its truth would commit her to accepting tables in her ontology. For instance, if the "no-table view" supporter accepts the existence of mereological simples (such as fundamental particles) and a version of the restricted composition thesis[28], she may claim that what makes (2) true is not the existence of composite objects (tables), but rather the existence of certain simples and their spatiotemporal locations (whereas for truths concerning other ordinary objects she will appeal to the existence of the entities composed by certain simples). A "no-table view" of the ostrich variety, however, will accept (2) and provide a plain explanation of its truth. The simplest form of this position is to consider (2) as an ungrounded truth. Alternatively, the "no-table view" supporter could take as explanans ungrounded truths concerning simples and their spatiotemporal locations. In *neither* case does the ostrich take those truth explanations to require the endorsement of a substantial metaphysical doctrine. Thus, unlike the reductionist, the ostrich can do away not only with tables, but also with the particles that compose them.

The problem with the ostrich version of the "no-table view" is that it is the first step on a slippery slope, which it seems difficult to stop. Imagine a "no-table, no-chair view" according to which there are no tables and chairs, while all other ordinary objects exist. Such a view is even more parsimonious than the "no-table view", and if plain truth explanations of truths about chairs are no less good than plain truth explanations of truths about tables, its parsimony counts as a benefit. But the same reasoning can be repeated for other sorts of ordinary objects, and we have now started on a slippery slope that will lead us to a form of "lazy nihilism" according to which nothing exists, while all truths are ungrounded truths. The same slippery slope, indeed a steeper one, can start from ostrich presentism. If plain explanations are accepted as truth explanations for TptECs, a "lazy nihilist" can argue for his position by adopting such a strategy for all *present truths* as well. If we can accept unrestricted plain explanations, then "lazy nihilism" is more parsimonious than ostrich

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[28] Certain philosophers accept an unrestricted composition principle, to the effect that any combination of simples corresponds to a existing composite object; those who accept a restricted version of the composition principle maintains that some but not all combinations of simples corresponds to an existing composite object; the "mereological nihilists" think that no combination of simples corresponds to an existing composite object. See van Inwagen 1990.

presentism, and its parsimony does not come with a cost in explanatory power. Maybe "lazy nihilism" is not as crazy a view as it at first appears, but it is incompatible with maintaining distinctive ontological tenets such as the view that forks and cups exist, but tables don't — or, more interestingly, that present entities exist and past entities don't. Hence, the ostrich presentist must resist the slippery slope. But how can she, given that plain explanations work for the present as much as for the past?[29]

One may be reluctant to fully accept the analogy between the "no-table view" and presentism; one may be inclined to think that while a supporter of the "no-table view" has taken the first step on a slippery slope, the ostrich presentist hasn't. All in all, the "no-table view" supporter seems both to deny the existence of tables (when she states her ontological commitments) and to accept it (when she accepts (2) as true), while the ostrich does not seem to risk contradicting herself by accepting (1)[30]. I think there is a difference here between the two cases, but I also think that it should not be overestimated. On the one hand, presentists do face an ontological commitment problem when they accept (1). As I have argued in §I, the presentist can solve it *easily*, by rejecting (1') as a reading of (1) and accepting (1'') instead. Yet, that (1) has to be read as (1'') rather than as (1') is a substantial philosophical thesis, which the presentist is endorsing, and for which she will possibly provide arguments. For instance, the presentist can argue that (1'') has some privileged semantic link with (1) that (1') lacks, such as providing its truth-conditions. On the other hand, it is not implausible for the "no-table view" to argue that ordinary language is loose enough to allow for different readings of present tense statements such as (2), in particular between one that is ontologically committal and one that is not. Such a view has some plausibility also for the "ordinary view" supporter. For instance, imagine an "ordinary view" supporter who does not believe in *ways* as a peculiar sort of entities, while accepting ordinary talk quantifying "the ways someone moves" as true when read in a non-committal way. The "no-table view" supporter can maintain that she accepts (2) in its non-committal reading, while denying its committal reading. In the non-committal reading the truth of (2) will then be explained as pointed out above. If the "no-table view" is a reductionist, she explains it through a metaphysical explanation that makes reference to simples and their spatiotemporal location. If she is an ostrich, she explains it through an ungrounded truth that sets her on the slippery slope.

V Ostrich Presentism, and the Case of Negative Existentials

The core of the "slippery slope" problem for the ostrich fleshed out above is that since unrestricted plain explanations are compatible with *any* kind of fundamental metaphysics, the ostrich presentist's solution to the problem of providing a ground for TptECs can easily overgeneralize to the denial of ontological status of any category of entities — no matter how idiosyncratic. Now, even if the ostrich presentist complies with my worry, she may insist that a presentist has independent reasons for maintaining that the present has a privileged status. According to presentism, the present is privileged precisely in being the only "locus" of what exists and what genuine properties are exemplified by what exists. Given that present-tensed truths are about the

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[29] Note that the problem of motivating a restriction to the plain explanation that we can accept is not, for the "no-table view" supporter the same as that of providing a principled way to restrict the composition principle to non-tables — namely the problem of finding a non-arbitrary way of restricting composition, see Lewis 1991: 79ff. The reductionist "no-table view" supporter has the problem of not slipping into *mereological nihilism* (according to which *no* composite object exists, see note 28). However, she cannot deny the existence of atoms in providing *metaphysical explanations* of ordinary existential claims about composite objects. While in so far as ungrounded explanations are accepted, it is difficult to see what could prevent someone from accepting ungrounded truths about simples too (if she accepts claims about simples at all).

[30] Remember that we have granted that the presentist can solve the ontological commitment problem by maintaining that quantifiers within the range of past tense operators are not committal. My thanks to a referee for pointing out this dysanalogy.

present and past-tensed truths are not, truth explanations of present-tensed truths are different from truth explanations of past-tensed truths. In particular, present-tensed truths are the only truths explained by appealing to what exists and to what properties are exemplified by what exists. Thus, even though in principle the ostrich presentist could appeal to plain explanations also in providing truth explanations of present-tensed truths, not doing so is a way to express the privileged status of the present that characterizes presentism.

I will not argue here against the presentist's thesis of the ontological privilege of the present. Even granting that the passage from plain explanations concerning past-tensed truths to plain explanations concerning present-tensed truths can be resisted, it is problematic to appeal to ungrounded truths in providing truth explanations of TptECs. The fact that the present is privileged can justify the fact that truth explanations of present-tensed truth are different from truth explanations of past-tensed truths, but TptECs are not the only truths about what does not exist that a presentist is likely to accept. Does the fact that the past does not exist entail that explanations of past-tensed truths are plain explanations in a primitive past-tensed language? This can't be so; otherwise, from the fact that Arctic penguins do not exist, we should conclude that the truth of (3) is explained by claiming that *there were Arctic penguins*, which is false.

(3) There are no Arctic penguins

Obviously the presentist needs to distinguish between how truth explanations about entities that existed work and how truth explanations about entities that never existed work. Appealing to the privilege of the present is not of any help here.

An idea the ostrich may exploit in order to provide a principle to discriminate between truths about past entities and truths about other non-existents is that supervenience of truth on being works "transtemporally". What is true now may merely require that something was (or will be) the case, but not a difference in reality (if reality is confined to the present, as the presentist maintains). In other words, the ostrich maintains that instead of (GI), we should endorse the more lenient (GI') below.

(GI') Any two worlds that differ with respect to what claims are true must also differ with respect to what existed (and what properties were, are and will be exemplified by what existed) *or* exists (and what properties were, are and will be exemplified by what exists) *or* will exist (and what properties were, are and will be exemplified by what will exist)[31]

Can the presentist justify such a relaxation of the principle?[32] Tallant has argued that (TM-max) "it's a generalisation from cases where truths (seemingly) obviously do have truthmakers (<I'm hungry>, <the rose is red>, <sugar is sweet> etc.), to cases where truths do not have truthmakers (<there are no Arctic penguins>, <I have no more than 5 coins in my pocket> etc.). The generalization from homespun cases is, of course, faulty[...]" (Tallant 2009a: XX). Something analogous may be said with respect to (GI). Rather than taking the principle as defining truth, we should take it a plausible hypothesis, one that holds with respect to many truths but may fail with respect to others.

Indeed, there seem to be cases which an eternalist too could accept that (GI) does not motivate an endorsement of metaphysical explanation. Remember that accepting ungrounded truths as explanans in truth explanations is not *by itself* sufficient to contravene (GI). Plain explanations may still be "well-behaved" with respect to (GI) — although it is prima facie difficult to motivate such a

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[31] Westphal (2006: 4) endorses a similar principle; Heathwood (2007) criticizes it.
[32] Baron (*forthcoming*) argues against the idea behind (GI') on the ground that cross-temporal modal relations are incompatible with presentism. Although I am sympathetic to his criticism, I will not pursue this line here.

restriction on ungrounded truth if not by endorsing (GI). However, consider true negative existential claims (TnECs) such as (3), repeated below.

(3) There are no Arctic penguins

Truthmaker maximalists who accept (TM-max) have introduced entities such as totality facts (i.e. facts about entities linked by a "totality" relation), and reified absences as truthmakers for negative existential truths[33]. People who find such entities metaphysically distasteful have opted for taking negative existential truths to be exceptions to (TM-max). Here is a frequently quoted passage from David Lewis:

"How about negative existential truths? It seems, offhand, that they are true not because things of some kind do exist, but rather because counter-examples don't exist. They are true for lack of falsemakers. Why defy this first impression?
(Don't say: 'Aha! It's a lack that makes it true.' The noun is a happenstance of idiom, and to say that a negative existential is true for a lack of falsemakers is the same as to say that it's true because there aren't any falsemakers. The demand for truthmakers might lead one into ontological seriousness about lacks, but not vice versa)." (Lewis 1992: 216)

Can we repeat the same reasoning against the requirement that all truth explanations must be metaphysical explanations? After all, Lewis is insisting that what explains the truth of a true negative existential claim is the lack of something in the world, and then he stresses that we should not take his talk of lacks as committal. If so, we can explain why TnECs are true without providing a metaphysical explanation. That may be what Lewis is claiming here, and yet he is not defending the idea that *unrestricted* plain explanations are legitimate truth explanations. He presents the cases of negative existentials as an exception to (TM-max) on a par with the case of ordinary (and present tense) true predications, such as "the rose is red". With respect to the latter, it is clear that they are presented as counterexamples to (TM-max) — and the acceptance of entities such as states of affairs (or facts, or tropes) — but not against (GI). Indeed, a few pages later, Lewis introduces (GI) as *an amendment* to (TM-max), and in glossing informally (GI) as the requirement for truths to have subject matter, he explicitly refers to negative existentials as a cognate case, although a peculiar one. Here is the quote:

"I think it [i.e. (TM-max)] is an over-reaction to something right and important and under-appreciated. What's right, roughly speaking, is that truths must have things as their subject matter. The special case of a negative existential is the exception that proves the rule. Exactly because there are no things of the appropriate sort, very little is true about them. The whole truth about Arctic penguins is: there aren't any. Whereas the whole truth about Antarctic penguins would fill many a book. Indeed, a subject matter can be empty. That's one way for it to be -- just one way. But a subject matter can be non-empty in ever so many different ways." (Lewis 1992: 218)[34]

As I read it, Lewis is not claiming that negative existentials are a counterexample to (GI), and thus to the requirement of providing metaphysical truth explanations for them. The fact that they lack a subject matter, or rather that their subject matter is empty, does not put them beyond the dependence of truth on reality. It just trivializes the way they depend on reality.

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[33] Totality facts are introduced by Armstrong 1997; reified absences by Kukso 2006. Cameron 2008 has defended (TM-max) against the objection from negative existentials by arguing that the world itself is intrinsically such that it excludes the existence of truthmakers for the positive counterparts of TneCs.
[34] It is also clear that Lewis does not want to equate the case of negative existentials with that of past tensed truth. Quite the opposite, in fact:, he warns us against this a few lines after.

Now, interesting as an exegesis of Lewis may be, I do not intend to state an argument from authority. Indeed, the case of ordinary predication is prima facie different enough from the case of negative existentials to motivate a different kind of truth explanation. Can the ostrich presentist argue that (i) negative existential truths do not require a metaphysical explanation (unlike ordinary present tense predications), and (ii) we can legitimately generalize from the case of negative existential truths to the case of TptECs? No. Because even if (i) is true, (ii) is not. Even if we accept TneCs as exceptions to the requirement of providing metaphysical explanations, it does not follow that we have reasons to extend the exception to TptECs — since TptECs lack that feature of TneCs that motivates the idea that we are legitimated to explain their truth by non-metaphysical explanations. This is the reason why.

As we have seen, one can accept (1) without thereby being committed to dinosaurs, but that does not tell us much about what entities one has to accept (if any) to provide truth explanations of TptECs. If a presentist accepts (TM-max), she may provide a strict ontological explanation of TptECs by reference to past tensed facts, uninstantiated haecceities, or non-existent Meinongian objects. If one rejects (TM-max), but still complies with (GI), one can explain TptECs by referring to the genuine past-tensed properties that the world presently instantiates, while not being committed to accepting the existence of the corresponding facts. If one rejects (GI) too, as the ostrich does, one can restrain the plain explanations that one accepts as truth explanations by accepting (GI').

Is the ostrich situation similar to that of the eternalist who maintains that an explanation of why TneCs are true does not require an appeal to existents or patterns of instantiation of properties by the existents[35]? It also looks as if the eternalist, in such a case, is rejecting (GI) and assuming (GI'') instead as a constraint on truth explanations.

(GI'') Any two worlds that differ with respect to what claims are true must also differ with respect to what exists, and to what properties are instantiated and not instantiated by what exists, and to what does not exist, and to what properties are instantiated and not instantiated by what does not exist.

Now, there is a crucial aspect in any kind of explanation of TneCs — no matter whether plain, metaphysical or a strictly ontological one. The explanation of their truth (even if it consists simply in their being ungrounded truths) has to rule out that the actual world *is* in certain ways. For instance, no matter how I explain the truth of (3), if the explanation is compatible with the world containing Arctic penguins, the explanation will be no good. Take a maximalist who accepts negative facts, such as the fact that the world does not contain Arctic penguins. Thus, (3) is true in virtue of the existence of such a fact. However, if that negative fact's existence were compatible with the presence of Arctic penguins in the world, the explanation would be completely bogus. How can a negative fact explain the truth of (3), if its existence is compatible with the existence of a truthmaker for "there are Arctic penguins"? (Note that even necessitation would fail).

But the same also holds for a plain explanation. The division between true negative existential claims and non-true negative existential claims cannot be seen independently from what exists in the actual world, even if the truth of TneCs is not explained by what exists in the actual world. Regardless of whether TneCs require metaphysical explanations or whether it is enough to provide a plain explanation of why they are true, there is a form of interdependence between their truth and the (positive) situation in which the world is. The correlation can be captured by the following principle (PN) connecting the positive features of a world and its negative features.

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[35] One way to cash this out is to take TneCs as ungrounded truths. Another way is to claim that their truth explanation is the fact that their negation lacks a truth-maker, and to take such an explanation as ungrounded (Tallant 2010b)

(PN) Any two worlds that differ with respect to what exists and what properties are instantiated by what exists must also differ with respect to what properties are not instantiated by what exists, and to what does not exist and what properties are instantiated and are not instantiated by what does not exist.[36]

It is because there is such a correlation between the behavior of the existent and the behavior of the non-existent that accepting plain truth explanations for TnECs require us to give up (TM-max), but not (GI). By accepting a principle such as (PN), we guarantee that ungrounded TnECs will still be constrained to behave in accordance with (GI). Indeed, it easy to see that (GI'') together with (PN) entails (GI). In other terms, (PN) makes it the case that plain explanations of TnECs will be "well-behaved".

At this point, the ostrich presentist may look for an analogous principle, which warrants the well-behavedness of the ungrounded truths that she endorses as explanans in truth explanations of TptECs. Consider the following principle (PP) connecting the behavior of past and the behavior of the present.

(PP) Any two worlds that differ with respect to what exists and what genuine properties are instantiated by what exists must also differ with respect to what existed and what genuine properties were instantiated, are instantiated, and will be instantiated by what existed [37]

Reductionist presentists accept (PP), but they do not restrict "what exists and what genuine properties are instantiated by what exists" to ordinary object and properties — they include in the present either distributional properties, or Lucretian properties, or Meinongian entities, or whatever they prefer as grounds of TptECs. Thus, the reductionist's reading cannot be the reading of (PP) that the ostrich accepts. But accepting a principle such as (PP), while *not* accepting some form of reductionistic presentism, is tantamount to denying that there may have been different past histories leading to the same present[38]. This does not look like the kind of motivation that is moving the ostrich in defending the idea that ontological parsimony is compatible with satisfactory truth explanations of TptECs. But if the ostrich does not endorse (PP), the analogy between TnECs and TptECs breaks down, and the question is whether the ostrich is legitimized to pass from plain truth explanations of TneCs, which are constrained by (PN), and which do not require a modification of (GI), to plain truth explanations of TptEc, which are not constrained by (PP), and do require that we drop (GI) in favor of (GI'). I suspect that the difference between the two cases is wide enough to block the step from the first to the second. At least, if one is legitimized to provide a plain explanation of the truth of TneCs because the truths about what does not exist are still constrained by the existent, the same kind of legitimation cannot be provided by the ostrich presentist with respect to TptECs.

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[36] The principle is close to what Kit Fine has called the thesis of World Actualism "Two possible worlds that agree on the behavior of the existents cannot differ on the behavior of the nonexistents" (Fine 1981: 295).

[37] Cf. the thesis of World Presentism by Hinchliff 2010.

[38] The intuitive principle that the past is (largely) independent from the present (IP) can be formulated as the negation of (PP).

(IP) It is not the case that any two worlds that differ with respect to what exists and what genuine properties are instantiated by what exists must also differ with respect to what existed and what genuine properties were instantiated, are instantiated and will be instantiated by what exists.

Sanson and Caplan 2011, in discussing the problems that arise for the presentist in explaining the truth of TptECs, have formulated the thesis of the Independence as "Not all truths about the past supervene on the present". According to them, inflationary reductionists deny it because the extra entities or properties that they accept have the function of "perfect records" of the past, and can ground TptECs. Note that the ostrich can accept the thesis of independence in Sanson and Caplan's formulation, in so far as she maintains that many truths about the past do not supervene on anything — because they are ungrounded or grounded on the falsity of their negation.

Conclusions

Past existence is a familiar notion, which can be construed in at least two different ways, depending on whether we consider ontology to be a matter independent of time — as eternalists do — or we take the present time to be the only arena that comprises what there is — as presentists do. This difference between points of view is deep, and in arguing for or against either position philosophers have clarified profound theoretical aspects of the nature of time. The issue of how to ground the present truth of claims about the past has led to a fierce debate between these two ontological positions. In the present state of the art, the presentists' proposals cannot match the explanatory appropriateness of the eternalist account, or at least their explanatory power comes at an unavoidable cost. The cost may be worth paying if the ontology of presentism is preferable on independent bases. However, a presentist who endorses an ostrich position in providing a truth explanation for past truths risks to legitimize a theoretical tool — unconstrained plain explanations — that is out of place in metaphysics[39].

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