


# The Analytical Metaphysics of Time and the Recent Theory of History: Overtones of the Debate about Presentism

A Metafísica Analítica do Tempo a Recente Teoria da História: Sobretons do Debate acerca do Presentismo

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## ABSTRACT

The longstanding line of research that the analytic tradition calls metaphysics of time remains quite ignored by the theory of history. To bring them closer, this study proposes to introduce to historians and theorists of history the metaphysics of time theses about the presentism/eternalism and the linear/closed time. For such purpose, we drew correspondences between the theory of history and the analytical metaphysics of time concerning some characteristics of the emerging concepts of historical time. These characteristics are related to the recent debate about presentism regarding the regimes of the historical time (multiple temporalities, presence, and pluritemporality); plural time in the analytical metaphysics and synchronous/asynchronous historical time; linear/closed time in the analytic tradition and being affected by historical time. As a result, this article presents how the analytical metaphysics of time theses disclose unnoticed contours related to the history theorists' understanding about the relation with the past.

## KEYWORDS

Historical Time. Presentism. Philosophy of History.

## RESUMO

A duradoura linha de pesquisa que a tradição analítica chama de metafísica do tempo é bastante desconhecida para os teóricos da história, apesar da prolífica nova metafísica do tempo histórico. Conseqüentemente, apresentamos aos historiadores e teóricos da história as teses da metafísica analítica do tempo acerca do presentismo/eternalismo e do tempo linear/fechado. Então, traçamos correspondências entre a teoria da história e a metafísica analítica do tempo quanto a conceitos emergentes de tempo histórico. Essas correspondências convergem para a recente discussão acerca do presentismo quanto aos regimes de tempo histórico (temporalidades múltiplas, presença e pluritemporalidade); o tempo plural na metafísica analítica e o tempo histórico síncrono/assíncrono; tempo linear/fechado na tradição analítica e ser afetado pelo tempo histórico. Como resultado, o presente artigo mostra que as teses da metafísica analítica do tempo descritas revelam alguns contornos pouco notados da compreensão que teóricos da história mantêm acerca da relação com o passado.

## PALAVRAS-CHAVE

Tempo histórico. Presentismo. Filosofia da História.

## Introduction

Historians tend to view natural time as the plain, flat, and boring succession of clock time. Nevertheless, it keeps complex textures and secrets similarly to historical time. This article approaches philosophical studies about natural time that can help the theorists of history to think over some issues related to the current debate around the concept of historical time. We will approximate the metaphysics of natural time in the analytical philosophy and of the metaphysics of historical time in the recent theory of history owing to a coincidence that invites us to bring them conceptually close, since both focus on the so-called presentism.

### Concepts of historical time in the current theory of history and the regimes of the plural characteristic of historical time: multiple temporalities and polytemporality

The concepts of historical time underwent a renewal from the 2000s on, so that a “new metaphysics of time” arose. Theorists of history call new metaphysics of time the recent reconceptualization of historical time; however, they do not imply any relationship between this and the analytical metaphysics of time, with which they show little acquaintance, if any at all. Consequently, qualifying the theorists of history metaphysics of time as the metaphysics of *historical* time is necessary to disambiguate it from the analytical metaphysics of time.

First of all, reconceptualizing historical time shows not only a transient movement, but also a paradigmatic turn in the discipline. In fact, the theorists of history indicate that the former internal disciplinary division between realists and narrativists might have become out of date:

what strikes us as most interesting about this trend is the way that some of these theorists have sought to move beyond the emphasis on language and representation not by returning to a crude variant of objectivism or empiricism but by re-examining our relationship to the past and the past’s very nature and by attempting to construct *a new metaphysics of [historical] time* (KLEINBERG 2012, p. 1, emphasis added).

Secondly, the relationship among the dimensions of time raises the debate about presentism, both in the theory of history, and in the analytical metaphysics of time.

Therefore, an overview on this outstanding issue will allow this article to achieve its main objective, which is to show that the analytical metaphysics of time may contribute to the metaphysics of historical time of the theory of history, despite their different backgrounds.

The metaphysics of historical time is specifically concerned about the time dimensions. In effect, the past, present, and future relationship establishes the way the past hits the present and opens it up to the future. Although moral, political, aesthetic and material relations with the past are evident and common (PAUL 2015, p. 146), the historians and theorists of history are mostly interested in the *epistemic* relation with the past: "People have an epistemic relation with the past when they seek knowledge and/or understanding of historical reality" (PAUL 2015, p. 35). The criteria that distinguish the epistemic relation from other relations with the past are: "accuracy, comprehensiveness, consistency and originality" (PAUL 2015, p. 121-122). Most of all, the epistemic relationship among past, present, and future describes if the past entertains a plural relation with the present, since the experience of historical time produces different patterns of past, present, and future relationship (SIMON 2019, p. 74). The plural characteristic of the dimensions of historical time is probably the most prominent trait in the recent configuration of the concepts of historical time. Thus, the issue of a plural historical time arises and overshadows the model that prevailed either in the realistic or in the narrativist theory of history (TAMM; OLIVIER 2019, p. 14-16; FARELD 2018, p. 54; BURGES; ELIAS 2016, p. 11) In general, the renewal of historical time regarding the relationship among past, present, and future can be observed in the different patterns of the plural characteristic of time that the new concepts of historical time deploy (CARDOSO JR. 2020).

In the recent theory of history, three main different patterns of the plural characteristic of time emerge.

Firstly, Zammito (2004) appeals to Koselleck's multiple temporalities to conceive a realistic relationship among past, present, and future. The "actual evidence" of the past reveals the non-linear time that develops itself in between the "space of experience" and the "horizon of expectation", as stated by Zammito: "The space of experience is the arrayed past for a given present, and the horizon of expectation is the cutting edge of future possibilities for any given present" (ZAMMITO 2004, p. 128-129). Likewise, according to Jordheim, Koselleck's temporality assumes that the past is made of multiple layers whose endurance in the present discloses a "diachronic movement through the synchronic moment" (JORDHEIM 2012, p. 166). The multiple temporalities

that diachronize the present moment unfreeze the layers of the past and put them at work within the present (JORDHEIM 2012, p. 153-154).<sup>1</sup>

Secondly, Bevernage appeals to “spectral time” (BEVERNAGE 2008, p. 159) to observe that the past haunts and stirs the self-compliant linear history. Hence, the plural characteristic of historical time allows “a critique of the time concepts that force us [...] to the formulation of an alternative chronosophy” (BEVERNAGE 2008, p. 155). Similarly, for Kasabova, a faithful understanding of what historians do lies in the immediate presence of the past in the present: “Far from being represented or reproduced in the present, the past manifests its presence in the here and now” (KASABOVA 2008, p. 333). Representing presence requires a “semantic transposition or relocation [between present and past experiences] by means of a part–whole relation establishing the [selective] link between what is retained and what is retrieved” (KASABOVA 2008, p. 341).

Thirdly, in contrast with the previous metaphysicians of historical time, Bonneuil requires from the theory of mathematics a different regime for the plural characteristic of historical time that does not depend on the retractable distance between space of experience and horizon of expectation. The new image reshapes the past, present, and future relationship according to the point-to-set time arrangement (BONNEUIL 2010, p. 34). The operation basically associates each present-point with a set of pasts (BONNEUIL 2010, p. 35), which saves historical time from the illusion of the “single past reported by one story”, provided that the present conceals a “multitude of pasts and futures in store at each moment” (BONNEUIL 2010, p. 46). Likewise, Roth thinks that the openness of multiple pasts implies that the descriptions of the historical experience are continuously rearranged by the descriptions of past experiences, which change with the passage of history (ROTH 2012, p. 317, 338-339). The plural, non-linear outlook of historical time requires “negotiations of a fit between descriptions and experience” (ROTH 2012, p. 313). Likewise, for Runia, as we will see in detail in the next section, the “different levels” (RUNIA 2006, p. 8) of past, which are simultaneous and discontinuous to the plan of present, make historical reality effectively experienced. Overall, Bonneuil, Roth and Runia argue for a regime of the plural characteristic of historical time called “polytemporality” according to important theorists of history (TAMM; OLIVIER 2019, p. 11; BURGESS; ELIAS 2016, p. 13).

<sup>1</sup> The Koselleckian multiple temporalities can be associated both with the concept multitemporality of Kairos and demotes the monotonous linearity of Chronos (RAMALHO 2020), and with the *événement*, according to Badiou and Zizek (BECK 2017).

In short, in the recent historical theory, at least three regimes of the plural characteristic of historical time coexist: The Koselleckian multiple temporalities, the regime of presence, and the non-Koselleckian polytemporality. All of them take part in the debate around presentism and anti-presentism in the recent theory of history. Presentism and anti-presentism primarily approach the plural characteristics of historical time, since each holds its own regime of the relationship among past, present, and future.

In the following section we will introduce two theses on analytical metaphysics of time that will provide us with resources to approach presentism and anti-presentism in the new metaphysics of historical time.

## Theses of the metaphysics of time on presentism/eternalism and linear/closed time

John McTaggart's (1866-1925) article "The Unreality of Time" (MCTAGGART 1998), from 1908, founded the analytical metaphysics of time. It is the branch of the "philosophy of time that asks questions about the nature of temporal reality" (DENG 2018), and its development testifies "the importance of time in contemporary debates in metaphysics" (OAKLANDER 2014, p. xiv). The analytic metaphysicians of time are primarily interested in "the 'objective' time of physicists" (REYNOLDS 2012, p. 66), that is, natural or clock time, whereas historians and theorists of history focus on historical time.

McTaggart's foundational thesis launched a prolific and longstanding debate that established, at least, seven main ideas about natural time, which are usually presented in pairs that put together a thesis and a counter-thesis concerning different properties of time: a) realism/antirealism, b) presentism/eternalism, c) linear/closed time, d) real/unreal temporal change, e) endurantism/perdurantism, f) actualism/possibilism, and g) continuous/discrete time. Since the main objective of this article is to inspect some contours of the contemporary presentism and anti-presentism in the theory of history, we will discuss only two theses of the analytical metaphysics of time that, once brought together, allow us to draw significant analysis and results: presentism/eternalism, and linear/closed time.

## 1. presentism/eternalism

The analytical metaphysics of time presents a thesis about the relationship among past, present, and future that discusses the ontological status and plural relationship that the dimensions of time maintain.

In general, three varieties of the plural temporality are recognized. They have in common the objective present; however, they contend about limiting or extending the ontological status of present since “there is an objective present: a unique time that reality itself picks out as special” (CAMERON 2016, p. 110). Firstly, if existence is assigned to the latest time that exists, past and present exist, but not future, since time grows as it passes and it does not include yet-to-come events or facts. This variety is called the “growing block theory” (DENG 2018). Secondly, if the analytic metaphysician of time ascribes the ontological privilege of being present to the fleeting now, past and future only acquire existence becoming present in the dimensionless coming-to-be or “moving Now” (DOLEV 2007, p. 7). This position is called the “moving spotlight theory” (DENG 2018). Thirdly, if the privilege is assigned to the present, it is the only time that it exists. This variety is known for its plural relationship among past, present, and future, and it is called presentism. The third variety will be the focus of this article.

Presentists appeal to the evidence that it is only possible to assign existence to a past event or thing if the present is the referent: “Who can deny that there existed something identical with the Roman Empire which is no longer present?” (REA 2003, p. 212-213). For the presentists, the past and the future do not hold the same status as the present, for only the present is real and is the measure for the other times to be experienced as time: “All that constitutes reality is how things are now. The past was part of reality, but it exists no more. The future will be part of reality, but it has not yet come into existence” (DUMMETT 2004, p. 73). Presentism establishes therefore that everything that exists, exists in the present time and what exists in the past and in the future can only be reported by analogy with the present (ZIMMERMAN 2008, p. 213; CRISP 2003, p. 211-212). For the presentists, someone exists in the present, but it is not possible to say that Plato and dinosaurs existed as a thing existing in the present, since what is here and now for someone is not the same that was for Plato and the dinosaurs in the past. In short, the reality of time depends on the immediacy of the present.

In turn, eternalism does not privilege any dimension of time. Hence, past, present, and future are on the same ontological footing: “Eternalism is typically stated as the view that *past, present, and future things exist*” (FIGG 2017, p. 1), (see also CRISP

2003, p. 218-219 and SIDER 2008, p. 243). The existence of things and events refer to propositions that hold their truth-values eternally: "a proposition has its truth-value eternally if it is either always true or never true." (CRISP 2003, p. 212) For the eternalists, someone exists as much as Plato and dinosaurs exist in the present, so the truth of these propositions are eternal. However, a unicorn does not exist, since the propositions about their existence are never true (CRISP 2003, p. 211). In contrast with the presentists, eternalists think that being present has a relative status: "what is present for us is not what is present for Caesar, since we are at a different time from Caesar, just as what is here for me is not what is here for you, since we are in different places" (CAMERON 2016, p. 110). The thesis on presentism contends the thesis on eternalism, so that the latter is an anti-presentism.

## 2. linear/closed time

The plural relationship between the dimensions of time may be conceived of according to two arrangements, the "linear time" and the "closed time" (LE POIDEVIN 1993, p. 158-159). The diagram that portrays the linear time is a straight infinite line, for linear time "is infinitely extended" between before and after according to an "asymmetric and irreflexive" (LE POIDEVIN 1993, p. 158) relationship. A temporal relationship of such type implies that a previous event causes the subsequent event. Consequently, if time is arranged in an infinite line, it has the definite, forward direction that the ordering of the events assigns it to have. They keep their past, present, and future individual characteristics as time passes. On the contrary, closed time is "finitely extended", since the relationship among past, present, and future is symmetric and reflexive. Consequently, "in closed time, every instant is both before and after every other (including itself)" (LE POIDEVIN 1993, p. 158). Hence, it is not possible to assign to time a preferable order. The diagram that better portrays the relationship among past, present, and future, according to the closed time, is the circle without any assignable direction.

The hypothesis of time-travel exemplifies the difference between the linear and the closed time concerning the direction of time. According to the linear-time thesis, if a time-traveler could change any past event, the ordering of time would change through and through, and the outcoming present would change accordingly. However, according to the closed-time thesis, if a time-traveler that goes back in time could change any past event, his/her action would be useless, since the order of time would reset itself and remain closed. Closed time is a curve that returns to the starting point, so that the outcoming present, even if the past is somewhat disturbed, does not bear any



change. Even though the time-traveler could possibly change some circumstances in the previous events, the order of time does not go astray as to decentralize the steady self-returning circle of time.

In general, linear time suits presentism because the asymmetric order of time assures that a change might occur over a past event for the order of time to be started and altered. It means that the present is the reference for the past to experience any significant change. In turn, closed time fits eternalism, since the symmetric order of time demotes the privilege of the past as the antecedent in the time chain. Consequently, the past could only be changed according to circumstances that do not disturb the overall outcoming present. In the long run, the closed-time/eternalist thesis prevailed over the linear-time/presentist one in the analytical metaphysics of time.

In the following section, some correspondences between the approaches of both the analytical metaphysics of time and the theory of history related to the past, present and future plural relationship are drawn.

### Correspondences between historical time and the analytical metaphysics of time about presentism

The following correspondences will be made according to the theses of analytical metaphysics of time previously explained about the relationship among past, present, and future. The first correspondence will discuss some undertones of the presentism/anti-presentism debate, which are common ground between the analytical metaphysics of time and the metaphysics of historical time in the recent theory of history: plural time in the analytical metaphysics and in the new historical metaphysics of time and synchronous/asynchronous historical time. Likewise, the second correspondence will discuss presentism and anti-presentism regarding the linear/closed time in the analytic tradition and being affected by historical time.

- i. presentism/anti-presentism: multiple temporalities/pluritemporality, plural time in the analytical metaphysics, and synchronous/asynchronous historical time

Among historians, the antipode of presentism is not eternalism as the analytical metaphysics of time established, but anti-presentism, which alleges that “the term ‘presentism’ usually carries pejorative overtones” (WALSHAM 2017, p. 213).

In the long run, there are a classical and a recent presentism and anti-presentism among theorists of history and historians. For the classical presentists Croce, Collingwood, and Carr, the present is an essential condition that historical knowledge cannot deny (ARMITAGE 2020), since “we live in the present and are motivated by the conditions of our own lives” (ORESQUES 2013, p. 596). The present casts projections upon the past and the future, provided that “they exist as the present’s own immanent modes” (TAMM; OLIVIER 2019, p. 2). The present provides access to the past, on the condition that suitable methodological procedures purge the historians’ work from the distorting effects of presentism over the past. For the classical anti-presentists, who “believe that the past must be approached on its own terms, and excessive reference to the present tends to impede this approach” (ORESQUES 2013, p. 595), presentism distorts past, even if the most cautious methodological work were adopted. In general, for them, presentism was considered the source of an anachronical representation of historical time due to wrong methodological choices: “reference to the present, for most historians (at least nowadays), is viewed as how to do history wrong” (ORESQUES 2013, p. 599).

Even if famous historians sided presentism, anti-presentism remained as the major portrait of what historians do, beginning with the positivist foundations of historiography in the nineteenth century. However, the recent impact of feminist, post-colonial, which brought back the presentist perspective of ethical, social uses of history, and historical trauma studies (WALSHAM 2017, p. 2013-214). Therefore, these recent historiographical trends forced the historians and theorists to face again the challenge that presentism posed. Lately, the presentism/anti-presentism debate is not primarily related to the historians’ methodological choices as in its classical picture, insofar as it compromises with ontological issues related to the concept of historical time.

In fact, the dispute about which position better suits the historians’ work nowadays has been displaced towards the debate around the plural characteristic of historical time. The new backdrop of theory of history indicates the latter as the common ground of historical time, in opposition to the “operation of distancing” or “historicization act” that important historians and theorists promoted in the past (FARELD 2016, p. 431 e 435). The plural characteristic of historical time is really significant among the emerging concepts of historical time and it implies different regimes of relationship among past, present, and future, as we will see.

The recent displacement of the debate has made “the concept of presentism [...] slippery, amorphous and polyvalent” (WALSHAM 2017, p. 217). Thereof, presentism is “a fertile ground whose limits and features need to be explored”

(TAMM; OLIVIER 2019, p. 15). Above all, the recent presentism does not fall in the trap of the linear time, which allows “a vision of history that is predicated on the seductive idea of steady upward progress towards a better future” (WALSHAM 2017, p. 216). However, for the recent anti-presentists as well, history “is far from linear; the search for the ‘origins’ or the universality of [...] any [...] contemporary phenomena in a much earlier period may be deeply misleading rather than illuminating” (WELCH 2017, p. 251). In short, most of the presentists and anti-presentists are pluralists regarding the relationship among past, present, and future: “For an increasing number of authors, time has become non-linear, complex and constituted in part by the preservation of the past in the present” (TAMM; OLIVIER 2019, p. 11). They are, nevertheless, divided as to the different regimes of the plural characteristic of history of time that presentists and anti-presentists adopt.

Similarly, the contemporary metaphysics of time developed by the analytic philosophy, as we saw, splits in two sides: presentists and eternalists. Eventually, the negotiation between presentist and anti-presentist analytic metaphysicians of time converges on different regimes regarding the plural relationship among past, present, and time, mostly like in the recent theory of history. In fact, the analytic metaphysicians of time observe that the plural characteristic of time involves the more basic experience of perceiving things physically in space and time. Are the dimensions of time simultaneously perceived? Or not? On the one side, from the presentist view of the plurality of time in the analytical metaphysics of time, all events are simultaneous to one another in the present, so that the experience follows from this “absolute simultaneity as to make what is physically real dependent on a single worldline” (SAUNDERS 2002, p. 281). On the other side, from the point of view of the eternalist, anti-presentist position, present cannot shrink to a simultaneous worldline to represent all that exists, because the plural characteristic of time does not have the present as reference. It is a sheaf of closed, self-returning curves, which no privileged observer located in the present can perceive at once (SAUNDERS 2002, p. 281). In short, the presentists affirm that the plurality of time tends to synchronization, whereas the anti-presentists believe that the plurality of time cannot be synchronized from an all-encompassing, simultaneous present.

Thereof, the movement towards plural time that the analytical metaphysics of time developed sheds new light on the simultaneous/synchronous or the non-simultaneous/asynchronous relationship between past, present, and future that the recent theory of history develops by its own means. In the theory of history, this issue is nowadays related to the question “as to how [...] differential temporalities relate to each other”

(TAMM; OLIVIER 2019, p. 12) and allows “taking into account, within historians’ time, of ‘another time’” (LORAUX 2005, p. 128), according to different regimes of the plurality of historical time.

Current presentism alleges that synchronization supports a positive way of approaching the plural characteristic of historical time, since it represents the way by which the past remains simultaneous to the present. In effect, the synchronization of multiple temporalities allows historiography to correct and prevent the harmful effects of presentism in the contemporary *Weltanschauung* as a *régime d’historicité* (HARTOG 2015, p. xvi). Hence, the presentist viewpoint does not overshadow the past, but guarantees the plurality of historical time: “present is definitively galvanized by multiple temporalities that collide dynamically and dialogically, effecting an experience of simultaneity” (BURGES; ELIAS 2016, p. 19). Consequently, presentism achieves a positive synchronization that adapts and adjusts “different times, different temporal regimes, to one another, to merge them into one to synchronize them”, thus meeting the Koselleckian regime of the plural characteristic of historical time, which is called “multiple temporalities” (JORDHEIM 2014, p. 513).

To demote the harmful effects of presentism as a dominant world view, some theorists of history look back to Heidegger and/or to the ultimate Heideggerian lineage (Gumbrecht and Agamben, for instance) to preserve the regime of multiple temporalities. Consequently, the ambivalence between proper and improper temporality redeems presentism from the dark shadows that the inauthentic relationship among past, present, and future casts over history. By all means, the Heideggerian antidote turns out restoring the authenticity of the future and criticizes the ruling role that the present plays in the contemporary experience to restore the healthy synchronous experience of historical time (INCLÁN; VALERO 2017 and ARAÚJO; PEREIRA 2019, p. 8-9).

In turn, the current anti-presentism argues against the negative effects of the presentist synchronization over the plural characteristic of historical time (BURGES; ELIAS 2016, p. 11-13), so that it is a positive task “to step outside presentism into a fully immersive, thickly described historical experience” (WELCH 2017, p. 253). Thus, it is necessary to move ahead by radically assuming the nonsynchronous historical time, which launches a type of regime of the plural historical time, the “pluritemporality”, not coined by the Koselleckian “contemporaneity of the noncontemporaneous” (KOSELLECK 1985, p. 90). Symptomatically, Landwehr claims that the presentist attempt to synchronize the non-synchronicities of the plural characteristic of historical time ends up retrieving the harmful “diachronic dissonance”, which reshapes the triumphalist and Eurocentric history that the old presentism stood for (LANDWEHR 2012, p.19-20).

Moreover, as Hunt severely warns: “There is a certain irony in the presentism of our current historical understanding: it threatens to put us out of business as historians” (HUNT 2002) for, “at its worst, [presentism] encourages a kind of moral complacency and self-congratulation” (HUNT 2002) that invalidates the ontological status of the past. For instance, Turin launched the hypothesis that the global economy promotes an acceleration of time that tends to harmfully synchronize the healthy synchronous dynamics of everyday life, to the extent at which it assembles the “neoliberal regime of historicity” that stands for presentism nowadays (TURIN 2019a, p. 252-253). However, presentism, as Hartog defines, stems from a problematic heuristic statement that makes the regime of historicity transhistorical (TURIN 2019b, p. 30). Therefore, the archetypical schemes about the current historical experience are vacuous not only regarding an ontological commitment to history (TURIN 2016: 593-595), but also unspecified regarding the ordinary experience of history that everyday life undergoes (TURIN 2019a, p. 247-248; NICOLAZZI 2010, p. 251-254)<sup>2</sup>.

In short, presentist historical theorists admit the Koselleckian synchronous multiple temporalities in the sense that the presentist metaphysicians of time allege. Similarly, anti-presentist theorists of history assume the non-Koselleckian, asynchronous polytemporality regime of plural time that the eternalist metaphysicians of time support in the analytic tradition. Both presentists and anti-presentists nowadays are cautious about the harmful synchronization that presentism as a regime of historicity might bring to the historical thinking and practice. Unlike Mudrovcic thinks, the historians of present may not fall in the trap of presentism, should they pay attention to the theorists of history (MUDROVCIC 2013: 11-12).

The first correspondence showed that the thesis of analytical metaphysics of time on presentism and eternalism provided a detailed definition of the regimes of the plural characteristic of time in the current debate between presentists and anti-presentists in the theory of history. The next correspondence between both will also show similarities that will disclose further inspection of the positions of presentist and anti-presentist theorists of history. Nevertheless, this time, the theoretical approach of the plural characteristic of time – the relationship among past, present, and future – will require us to develop the analytical metaphysics of time for the sake of the ethical issues that historical time poses regarding the renegotiation of the boundaries among past, present, and future.

<sup>2</sup> Turin and Nicollazzi draw upon the previous criticism about Hartog’s regimes of historicity regarding the problematic relation with the historiographical regimes, see (BLOCKER; HADDAD 2006 and HANNOUM 2008).

## ii. presentism/anti-presentism: linear/closed time in the analytic tradition and being affected by historical time

The shades of gray between presentists and anti-presentists among historical theorists nowadays can be further revealed if we lay hands on some of the resources that the analytical metaphysics of time has long been developing. Aiming at solving the tied positions between presentists and eternalists, the analytic metaphysicians of time turn to the idea that time can *affect* people in two ways (LE POIDEVIN 2003, p. 166-168). Being affected by time develops the linear/closed time theses concerning the plural characteristic of time.

For presentists, as we saw, the present is the consequence of the forward causation that begins in the past. That is,  $x$  being a previous event and the cause of the subsequent event  $y$  confirms that the latter cannot be the cause of the former. Causation over time must conform to the antecedent-consequent order because the relationship among past, present, and future is asymmetric (LE POIDEVIN 2003, p. 165). At any rate, if the acknowledged statements about the past changes, the affection of the past over the present alters likewise, on the condition that the past starts a chain of causal-related events provided that "statements about the past are true only in virtue of facts about present evidence" (LE POIDEVIN 2003, p. 172). Only the remains of the past in the present can change the recognized truth about the past, the latter stands still if not disturbed. In this sense, the plural characteristic of time assumes a linear arrangement. The past is present in the present insofar as it respects the forward causation and fits the asymmetric arrangement of the linear time, as observed.

For the presentist historians, affecting the past requires, not only a change regarding the recognized statements about the past, but also the "renegotiation of the boundaries between present and past" (FARELD 2016, p. 432) that, in consequence, shall displace the recognized statements about it. The past asks for revision and/or reparation. The present clings to the past since the latter harasses the former to create the expectation of some change in the present by the reparation of the past that does not go by. The past is not materially present in the present, it is the specter of a traumatic or repressed past that forces the present to look back in shame or fear. It forces the present to claim for justice to fix the past, redeem the victims and heal the present. The redemptive strength of the past launches a forward causal chain towards the present. The affection of time begins in the past with the reparation of the wounds and propagates asymmetrically onward with the consequent discharge and relief of the

burdened present. In fact, the present judges, but the past remains the same, even if appeared with its reparation from the point of view of the present. The difference that the presentification of the past brings is that, after the redeeming affection of the past, it can be effectively past and settles down, allowing the paid-off present to open up to the future. In these terms, presentist historians and presentist theorists of history believe that there is a forward causation that makes effective the affection of the past that purges the haunted present.

In contrast, for the anti-presentist analytic metaphysician of time (LE POIDEVIN 2003, p. 169), past, present, and future are equally real, since any past fact maintains its ontological status regardless of any present event or statement about the past. Being on the same ontological footing, past, present, and future are symmetric to each other, that is,  $x$  being cause of  $y$  is compatible with  $y$  being cause of  $x$ . According to the closed time thesis, “every instant is both before and after every other (including itself)” (LE POIDEVIN 1993, p. 158). Deprived of onward transmission, time stands still. Nevertheless, its immobility does not mean that it is irreversible and that the past cannot affect the present. For the anti-presentist, it is possible to conceive that the past affects the present regardless of the forwards causation hypothesis.

In effect, the analytic metaphysicians of time call the anti-presentist hypothesis about the order of time the “backwards causation” (LE POIDEVIN 2003, p. 180). For instance, a time-traveler writes the words “see you later” in a piece of paper when leaving his/her present in the twenty-first century, and travels back in time with the written paper. In the present when the paper was written, “see you later” led to serious consequences, which the time traveler would like to block. When landing in the past, the written sheet of paper becomes a past event, but its cause – being written – remains in the present, so the onward chain that guarantees the precedence of the cause over the effect is reversed. Due to the symmetric characteristic of closed time – “every instant is both before and after every other (including itself)” (LE POIDEVIN 1993, p. 158) – the cause of the past event  $y$  lies in the future event  $x$ , which is a present event in the twenty-first century. In short, the cause is ahead of its effect and the time traveler can read in the past a written sheet of paper that has not yet been written.

The phenomenon of backward causation is only possible according to characteristics of the closed time and cannot change the outcoming present, since there is no forward causal chain to put the affective action across to decisively hit the present. On the contrary, being the time travel performed along the linear time, if the time traveler rips up the written paper when he/she arrives in the past, it would have altered the chain

of time, so that the written sheet would vanish away as to cancel its compromising consequences in the present.

How about historians and theorists of history? Should they raise the time travel hypothesis to propose such a counterintuitive notion as the backward causation in closed time? To answer these questions, the next paragraphs will show that the fracture of the so-called "presence-paradigm" (BEVERNAGE 2008, p. 149) illustrates the difference between the presentists and the anti-presentists in relation to the forward and the backward causation in history, provided that the relationship among past, present, and future shows different regimes among the "theorists of 'Presence'" (KLEINBERG 2012, p. 3). Furthermore, since historical time involves the renegotiation of the boundaries among past, present, and future, the presentist/anti-presentist debate about the causation of time and the being affect by the past in the current theory of history discloses some issues that the analytical metaphysics did not deal with.

Bevernage's presence-paradigm version, according to the plural characteristic of time, as we saw, assumes that it is not possible for the past to be present in the present in an unrepresented and material way. For Bevernage, the spectral past in the present forces language to represent the plural relationship among past, present, and future according to the "idea of non-contemporaneity, anachronism, or local persistence of the past" (BEVERNAGE 2008, p. 157) in "the absolutely [synchronous] self-contemporaneous present" (BEVERNAGE 2008, p. 156). Bevernage contends that the idea that the past is present as a real thing led Runia's presence-paradigm, provided that it adheres to a realist regime of pluritemporality, to commit to the prejudice according to which "the 'presence' of the past is treated as the full [not spectral] presence that is the antonym of absence" (BEVERNAGE 2008, p. 165). Without the spectral past that remains in the present, it is impossible to start the forward causal chain that, affecting historical time, puts through the call for reparation and healing "to start from the ground up to create a new present or new time" (BEVERNAGE 2008, p. 166).

Likewise, Kasabova's presence-paradigm argues that Runia's antirepresentationalism, according to which "the past is present here and now" (KASABOVA 2008, p. 332), recalls the misleading old faith in the historical realism. According to Kasabova, the historical approach to the past obeys to an ordinary, forward causation that observes the asymmetric structure of time. Accordingly, the temporal order of historical time grounds the semantic dependence between temporal clauses, for "the former explains the latter 'earlier' grounds; 'later' is grounded in 'earlier' because 'earlier' explains 'later'" (KASABOVA 2008, p. 350).



In short, Bevernage's and Kasabova's presence-paradigm relies on the forward causation and, therefore, is of the presentist kind. On the contrary, Runia does not appeal to the sequential, asymmetric order of time provided that the backward causation disregards the idea of antecedent and consequent. Therefore, being  $x$  cause of  $y$ , and vice-versa, it sets a symmetric relation that rules the Runian presence. Consequently, the Runian anti-presentism disturbs the linear semantic dependence that the grammar assigns to the tensed representation of time, so that "Runia's stripe [a strong brand of realism'] would reject the claim that the past is a retroactive reconstruction, just as they would reject the claim that the past is represented in the present" (KASABOVA 2008, p. 335). For Runia's version of the presence-paradigm, indeed, the past is materially, and in an unrepresented way, present in the present (RUNIA 2006, p. 1). The historical causation or affection works symmetrically "upward to the present, and downward from the present." (RUNIA 2006, p. 20). As observed, the simultaneity in the order of time requires a symmetric arrangement according to the analytical metaphysics of time.

The disruptive realistic presence of the past – its "out-of-place-ness" (RUNIA 2006, p. 19) – "occurs when we are 'overtaken by history' and start—regressively—to do things that are at odds with our identity" (RUNIA 2006, p. 6). Unprecedented levels of the past, which are simultaneous and discontinuous to the plan of present, rush "upward to the present" and overthrow the expectations of the present (RUNIA 2006, p. 8). Past will only act and start a causal chain if the present starts first as the causal antecedent of the past. Time must rush "downward from the present". Unlike the presentist forward causation, the present does not heal or repair an immaterial, spectral past to launch the causal chain from the past towards the present, since it acts over a material past. The causal backward affection of present shall release, not the haunted present, but the past itself. In short, a present event shall cause the past to engender new events from the old ones (RUNIA 2006, p. 14). How does it work, then?

Since the backward causation obeys the inalterable circle of closed time, it cannot change the outcoming present. For instance, the time traveler, traveling back according to the closed time, cuts into pieces the compromising paper written in the future when arriving in the past. However, the outcoming present, even if the paper were torn up in the past, would find a way to be accomplished anyhow. In short, causation cannot heal the present or purge the past. Despite this disadvantage, the closed-time hypothesis grants to historical time the loose symmetric structure that does not observe a preferable order for time. The present affects the past backwards and urges a new time so that the present "is transformed into something that could not have been [neither] imagined"

(RUNIA 2006, p. 14). It is not the discharged present from the weight of the past that can at last move on, but a future moved by a brand-new past.

Consequently, the negotiation of the boundaries among past, present, and future does not work as its presentist version. The symmetry of closed time applies not only to the past that lies in the past, but also to the present that shall pass to make room for the future. In fact, the future removes the present by skipping over the outcoming present after the latter has symmetrically acted backwards upon the old past to extract new events from it. Since the closed time describes a circle, every instant of any outcoming present is in the neighborhood of the closure of the circle of time. In this sense, each past event is immediately in the here and now and thus can be counter-actualized whenever the present event skips over it backwards (CARDOSO JR. 2005).

In short, Runia's presence paradigm is of the anti-presentist kind. According to the analytical metaphysics of time, the present event causes the past event backwards in favor of an unprecedented time, not for the sake of the past itself: "if there were a large number of instances of events caused by later, rather than earlier, events, would the world not be rather more surprising than it is?" (LE POIDEVIN 2003, p. 183).

## Final remarks

We began by portraying two theses of the analytical metaphysics of time: presentism/eternalism and linear/closed time. The confrontation between both theses shed new light on the current debate concerning presentism and anti-presentism in the recent theory of history. In this debate, we focused on those dichotomies to reveal some unnoticed contours of recent concepts of historical time (metaphysics of historical time).

From this initial approach of two theses, we believe that further correspondences between the theses of analytical metaphysics of time and the characteristics of the emerging concepts of historical time seem to be worth of future research, although they were all not deeply analyzed in this article. The other recognized five theses of the analytical metaphysics of time are realism/antirealism, real/unreal temporal change, endurantism/perdurantism, actualism/possibilism, and continuous/discrete time, all of which raise good expectations regarding future studies on the subject.

This article also shows that an account of the general relationship between the analytical metaphysics of time and the new metaphysics of historical time is required. The cooperation of both seems to take a step forward regarding the overcoming of "a

certain kind of chronopathology – that is theoretical myopia about time” (REYNOLDS 2012, p. 77), which can infect both sides. On the side of the analytical metaphysics of time, the urge to retain the objective time of science or to emulate the natural and commonsensical attitude towards time tends to tie the metaphysics of time to a seemingly cautious ambition related to ordinary language and the epistemic patterns to which it is associated to avoid the risk of speculation due to either derisory nostalgia or utopic reverie.

Since the metaphysics of time ultimately depends on the McTaggartian hypothesis, the theory of history offers a range of concepts that challenges the idea that time is an experience mostly related to “a given order of events” (MCCUMBER 2012, p. 20) that people *accept* as their present situation. The ordering of historical time has different textures: “Sometimes the ordering is more independent of me, so that past events shape themselves into the production of a present reality with which one must cope. Other times I have more leeway to see the past as obliging me to cope with its results.” (MCCUMBER 2012, p. 20) Either way, past is flexible and unstable because history is something to be dealt with, even if one must bear it as an unavoidable outcome.

On the side of the metaphysics of historical time, this article showed, with the aid of the analytical metaphysics of time, that there are both presentist and anti-presentist theorists of history who have not been swept away by presentism as the current overarching regime of historicity.

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