

DISSECTING THE SUICIDE MACHINE ARGUMENT: INSIGHTS FROM THE HALES – LICON DEBATE

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ABSTRACT: I assess the debate over the Suicide Machine Argument. There are several lessons to be learned from this debate. First, there is a fruitful distinction to be made, between *tensed* and *tenseless* versions of presentism, despite the temptation to suppose that presentism is a *tensed* theory of time. Second, once we've made the distinction between different kinds of presentism, it is clear that Licon's objection protects the tenseless version of presentism from the Suicide Machine Argument; however, the argument is still effective against the tensed version. Finally, I argue that if the presentist wants to remain a card carrying presentist, in the face of the challenge posed by Hales, then she must abandon her commitment to tense.

KEYWORDS: Suicide Machine Argument, presentism, Steven Hales

1.

1.1. Introduction

There is a novel argument in the literature that purports to explain why it is that a presentist theory of time lacks the theoretical resources to accommodate the possibility of time travel. This is called the 'Suicide Machine Argument.'¹ The argument has been challenged in the literature:² Licon objects that a time machine, with the capacity to reconfigure the universe, such that it resembles a previously non-present moment, *in the right sort of way*, is able to defuse the challenge posed by the Suicide Machine Argument. Hales, who proposed the Suicide Machine Argument, argues that Licon's challenge to his argument fails; with a few clarifications, Licon responds that his objection is actually effective against Hales' argument.

¹ Steven Hales, "No Time Travel for Presentists," *Logos & Episteme* I, 2 (2010): 353-360; and Steven Hales, "Reply to Licon on Time Travel," *Logos & Episteme* II, 4 (2011): 633-636.

² Jimmy Licon, "No Suicide for Presentists: A Response to Hales," *Logos & Episteme* II, 3 (2011): 455-464; and Jimmy Licon, "Still No Suicide for Presentists: Why Hales' Response Fails," *Logos & Episteme* III, 1 (2012): 149-155.

1.2. An Overview of the Paper

In this paper, I survey the debate between Hales and Licon, as it has played out so far. There are two important lessons to be drawn. First, the debate highlights the neglected distinction between *tensed* and *tenseless* versions of presentism.³ Second, if this distinction is respected, it is clear that Licon's objection only serves to shield the *tenseless* version of presentism from Suicide Machine Argument, while failing to salvage the *tensed* version. Next, I argue that this is a vindication of Hales in the following sense: the *tensed* version of presentism, against which his argument is so effective, is the version accepted by a number of card carrying presentists. Finally, I conclude by arguing that the Suicide Machine Argument is a good reason for them to abandon tense, if they want to remain loyal presentists, capable of accommodating the possibility of time travel.

2.

2.1. Reviewing the Hales-Licon Debate

There is a relatively novel argument, in the philosophical literature, which purports to challenge the ability of presentism to accommodate the bare possibility of time travel; incidentally, the presumption at play, in the background of this debate is that any viable theory of time must have the theoretical resources to accommodate the possibility of time travel.

Crudely sketched, the Suicide Machine Argument amounts to this:

The presentist⁴ claims that *whatever exists in time, must reside in the present moment if they are to exist at all*. So, for instance, on the presentist conception of time, there are no *actually* existing dinosaurs, despite the fact that dinosaurs existed *at some point in the past*. (While, in contrast, eternalism⁵ is the view the moments in which the dinosaurs exist is on metaphysical par with the present moment, except that happened *before* the present moment). If presentism is the right story to tell about the nature of time, then it is difficult to see *how* someone

³ Cf. M. Oreste Fiocco, "A Defense of Transient Presentism," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 44, 3 (2007): 191-212 and Joshua Rasmussen, "Presentists may say goodbye to A-properties," *Analysis* 72, 2 (2012): 270-276. There are philosophers who think that presentism is fundamentally a tensed theory of time (cf. Paul Daniels, "Back to the Present: Defending Presentist Time Travel," *Disputatio* IV, 33 (2012): 469-484).

⁴ Ben Caplan and David Sanson, "Presentism and Truthmaking," *Philosophy Compass* 6, 3 (2011): 196-208 and Ned Markosian, "A Defence of Presentism," *Oxford Studies in Metaphysics* 1 (2004): 47-82.

⁵ Michael Rea, "Four-Dimensionalism," in *The Oxford Handbook of Metaphysics*, eds. Michael J. Loux and Dean. W. Zimmerman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

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could travel to a non-present moment, without ceasing to exist. If you can only exist in the present, and you leave the present, you cease to exist. Thus, on the presentist conception of time, traveling in time results in a kind of suicide. Call this the *Suicide Machine Argument*.

Suppose that Jones enters the time machine; programs the machine to take him into the distance past. The machine whirls, and disappears. This explanation for this is simple: anything that exists in time must reside in the present, on the presentist conception of time. The time machine, used by Jones, relocates itself to a moment in the past. Thus, it must have ceased to exist, resulting in the annihilation of its passenger. Consider an argument from elimination:

Either there is a (e.g.) past moment, *over and above* the present moment, for Jones to arrive at, or there is not. If there is a past moment, in addition to the present, then presentism must be false; after all, presentism claims that the present exists to the exclusion of all other moments. On the other hand, if there is no past moment in addition to the present, for Jones to occupy, then by leaving the present, Jones dies. If you think that a viable theory of time should be able to accommodate the possibility of time travel, Suicide Machine Argument is a serious challenge to presentism.

Consider what Hales writes:

For presentists, getting into a time machine is suicide – the occupant goes out of existence. Recall that presentists are committed to a purely objective present; the events and objects at this objective present alone are real, even if other things have been or will be real. After entering the time machine, Dr. Who no longer exists in the objective present, and therefore he is no longer in reality. Which is just to say that Dr. Who ought to view the time machine with considerable trepidation – after all, it means his annihilation.⁶

This argument rests on a questionable assumption: the time-traveling-options afforded to the time traveler must include the present moment existing *along with* the destination moment. But the existence of other moments is prohibited by the exclusive privilege; this because the presentist is committed to the claim that the present moment exhausts the inventory of *actual* moments. To help clarify the nature of presentism, consider the difference between presentism and eternalism: while presentism says that the present moment exists to the *exclusion* of every other moment, eternalism holds that the present moment exists to the *inclusion* of every other moment; in short, eternalism is the view that every moment is metaphysically on par with every other moment. So, just like there are

⁶ Hales, “No Time Travel,” 357.

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multi, co-existing points in space, even if unoccupied, on the eternalist theory of time, there are moments, other than the present, in the past, and future.

2.2. The Transform Option

If we approach the issue like so, it seems to gloss over a third possibility: the time traveler always has the option of transforming the present moment such that it is a destination, rather than departure moment. Call this the *transform option*. This is the option defended by Licon in the literature.⁷ Licon argues that the presentist can appeal to the sort of time machine capable of rearranging the universe so that it resembles the destination moment, in the precise way in which its matter and energy is arranged, while disassembling the departure moment, and doing the same, where the in-between moments that connect the destination and departure moments are concerned. Call this an *L-style time machine*.

The possibility of this machine illustrates how the presentist can accommodate the possibility of time travel, while staying faithful to their presentist commitments.

For instance, Licon writes:

The possibility of presentist time travel does not entail that the time traveler ceases to exist, but rather that it is possible for the present moment to accommodate the time traveler. Of course such a process must preserve the objective temporal exclusivity of the present. For example, consider a fighter jet F that is confined to taking off from and landing on a particular aircraft carrier C. It does not follow that if F leaves C, then F will have no place to land. It just means that F must take off from and land on C. Suppose that F needs to travel several miles away from its current position. The landing constraint does not entail that F cannot land, but rather that: *if F can land in in a location other than the location that F took off from, then C must have moved from the departure to the arrival location.*⁸

With the transform option in hand, consider the following example. Suppose that Jones gets into her *presentist*-friendly time machine, sets the dial for a past moment, and activates the machine. We should expect the machine to rearrange all the matter and energy in the universe, so that it resembles each moment, in succession, from the departure moment to the arrival moment, until Jones reaches the destination time; the machine does this by arranging all of the matter and energy in the universe, until it is identical to the next moment in the

⁷ Cf. Licon, "No Suicide," and "Still No Suicide."

⁸ Licon, "No Suicide," 460 – emphasis in original.

Dissecting the Suicide Machine Argument: Insights from the Hales – Licon Debate timeline. This process continues until the machine has actualized the destination moment.

2.3. A Humean Aside

We should clarify that the transform solution is Humean in nature; that is, it assumes that in order to bring about a particular moment, all you need to do is arrange the totality of the energy and matter in the universe, in the right way, such that it is arranged past-moment-wise. The final condition states that the order in which the moments that occur in between the departure and destination moments, up to and including those moments, must remain true to the order in which the moments *actually* occurred. It seems that we could not have a viable presentist theory of time, if a Humean-style approach to the identity conditions of moments didn't work out; this is because, unlike eternalism (i.e. the view that the present exists to the *inclusion* of all other moments), presentism holds that the present exists to the *exclusion* of all other moments. There are still earlier-than and later-than facts that even a presentist theory of time must contend with; e.g. it is a fact that Lincoln was assassinated *later-than* the dinosaurs roamed the Earth. Denying such facts would make any theory of time, presentism included, untenable.

We might imagine applying the transport option, to a presentist universe, where the following moments exhaust the universes' timeline: *Alpha, Beta, and Gamma*. If we wanted to travel from Alpha to Gamma, via Beta, the transport option says that our time machine must deconstruct Alpha, while constructing Beta; then it would have to deconstruct Beta, while constructing Gamma. Thus, the transform option says that if we use this process, then we could successfully time travel, from Alpha to Gamma, in a presentist universe.

3.

3.1. Presentism as a Tensed Theory of Time

As a brief aside from the Suicide Machine Argument, I want to briefly discuss the tensed (or tenseless) nature of the presentism, as a theory of the nature of time. It is widely supposed that presentism is a *tensed* theory of time. This simply means that moments have temporal properties *over and above* the order in which moments occur, on a given timeline. For instance, if a moment progresses from the future, to the present, and then recedes into the past, it exemplifies temporal properties, e.g. present-ness, which are entirely distinct from temporal relations, such as ordering (e.g. Alpha stands in an earlier-than relation to Beta; without

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anything metaphysically special about the moments *themselves*). There is something metaphysically distinct about moments that reside in the future, compared to a moment in the past; there is a 'flow' to time, so to speak, whereby future moments eventually exemplify past-ness, once they recede into the past, although these moments once exemplified future-ness.⁹

3.2. Clarifying the Difference between Tensed and Tenseless

It might help to think of the difference between tensed and tenseless theories of time in how they deal with the apparent privilege of the present moment. On the one hand, on the tensed theory of time, there is something about the present moment *itself* which makes it metaphysically different from past and future moments, while on the other hand, on a tenseless theory of time, the present moment only *seems to be* metaphysically different from past and future moments, but this is just a figment of the way we are temporally placed with respect to the present, past, and future moments – just like, for instance, the notion 'here' has meaning that is indexed relative to the person using the term (and their location and the time of their utterance), the notion of the present simply captures that moment to which an agent has the right kind of epistemic access, rather than capturing anything about the moment *itself*.

3.3. Different Kinds of Privilege

You might suppose that presentism is obviously a tensed theory of time simply because *there is* a metaphysical difference between the present moment, on the one hand, and past and future moments, on the other hand, in the sense that the present moment exists, while past and future moments do not. This is, no doubt, a kind of metaphysical privilege. For our purposes, however, I call that a kind of *existential* privilege. This kind of privilege is secured merely by existing, on the part of the present moment, to the exclusion of other moments.. Every species of presentism requires that the present moment has existential privileged in that it exists to the exclusion of all other moments.

Other than existential privilege, there is also a tense privilege; I alluded to this, briefly, earlier in this paper. This kind of privilege has to do with the nature of the moment *itself*, rather than its relationship to other moments. Take note that the existential privilege, which is common to all species of presentism, has to do with how the present moment relates to other moments. Tense privilege, on the other hand, has to do with nature of the moment itself. So, for instance, if a

⁹ Ted Sider, "Travelling in A- and B- Time," *The Monist* 88, 3 (2005): 329-335.

moment that used to exemplify present-ness, then recedes into the past, loses its present-ness such that it can take on the tensed property of past-ness.

The easiest way I can think of to explain tense privilege is to appeal to our experience of what it is like to reside in the present moment. There just seems to be something different about the present moment *itself*, compared to past and future moments; whatever the intrinsic difference amounts to, it is simply a matter of tense privilege. This is because, in part, tense and existential privilege, though they often travel together on some theories of time, they sometimes come apart. For instance, a moment might be privileged in a tensed sense (e.g. it exemplifies the property of *past-ness*), without an existential privilege (i.e. it does *not* exist to the exclusion of all other moments).

3.4. Distinguishing between Tensed and Tenseless Presentism

The fact that every species of presentism has a built-in existential privilege is not sufficient to make presentism a *tensed* theory of time, all by itself; this should be clear from what I've already said. Although tense is a kind of metaphysical privilege, the reserve fails to hold: a moment with tensed privilege is a moment that is *ipso facto* privileged; however, it is false that each privileged moment is *ipso facto* a tensed moment. This is because there are numerous kinds of metaphysical privilege that can be had, by moments, other than tense (e.g.) existential privilege.

As a way to bring out the relevant intuitions, consider an eternalist timeline made-up exclusively of the following three moments: *AA*, *BB*, and *CC*. Call this timeline *TIME*. This means that *TIME* is a tenseless temporal series, because eternalism is usually construed as a tenseless theory of time. There is nothing privileged about any of the moments *themselves* in *TIME*. First, there is nothing existentially privileged about any of the moments in *TIME*. Second, there is nothing privileged about any of the moments, in terms of tense. Suppose that from our perspective, *AA* resides in the past, while *CC* resides in the future; it is from our perspective that *BB* is the present. Suppose that a time manipulation machine destroys moments *AA* and *CC*, leaving *BB* as the *solitary* moment comprising our timeline. Call this approach *Destroy*. We could approach it from the opposite direction: there are no moments in an eternalist-friendly timeline, until the time manipulation machine creates *one*.¹⁰ Call this approach *Create*.

¹⁰ The time manipulation machine, in the Create scenario, might be housed in a different timeline. I want to set the issue of how multiple timelines are consistent with presentism aside, for the sake of brevity.

There is something that Destroy and Create share: each process produces a single moment (the present moment, relative to us) that exists to the exclusion of all other moments; that is, the solitary moment in Destroy and Create enjoys existential privilege, even though it does *not* enjoy tense privilege. The Destroy and Create moments comprise part of an eternalist-friendly timeline. These moments, in their respective timelines, do not exemplify tensed properties like past-ness; they do not enjoy tensed privilege, just like the moments in eternalist timeliness, but they do still enjoy existential privilege *unlike* their eternalist counterparts. Consider the remaining piece of the puzzle required, if we are to nail down a quick and dirty tenseless version of presentism: *the flow of time*. If we suppose that there is a flow of time, in a presentist-friendly way, it seems we have the makings of a tenseless presentist universe. We have a universe in which the present moment enjoys existential privilege (i.e. it exists to the exclusion of all other moments), but lacks any sort of tensed privilege (i.e. it does not exemplify present-ness).

3.5. Approaching the Distinction Differently

Consider that presentism is automatically committed to existential privilege; this is because, on presentism, the present moment is privilege to exist to the exclusion of all other moments (i.e. if something exists, in time, then it must reside in the present moment). But, it is a different matter entirely, whether the present moment, in a presentist universe, exemplifies tensed properties; a commitment to tensed privilege doesn't seem as fundamental, to the nature of presentism, as a commitment to the existential privilege. It is *at least possible* that there is a presentist universe, where the present moment has only existential privilege.¹¹

¹¹ I am implicitly appealing to a simple principle: if it is conceivable that p, then the possibility of p gets the benefit of the doubt (cf. William Lycan, "Free Will and the Burden of Proof," in *Minds and Persons*, ed. Anthony O'Hear (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 107-122 and Keith DeRose, "Plantinga, Presumption, Possibility, and the Problem of Evil," *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 21, 4 (1991): 501). The conceivability of p is *defeasible* evidence for the possibility that p.

Consider what Lycan writes:

I begin with a general methodological point about modality: compatibilism, not just about free will but generally, on any topic, is the default. For any modal claim to the effect that some statement is a necessary truth, I would say that the burden of proof is on the claim's proponent. A theorist who maintains of something that is not obviously impossible that nonetheless that thing *is* impossible owes us an argument (Lycan, "Free Will," 109).

We could secure the distinction, between tensed and tenseless versions of presentism, by stipulation: it is just the case that there could be a presentist universe where the present moment only enjoys existential privilege, without any sort of tense privilege. This seems like a reasonable move, in part, because it seems as though there could be a moment that exists to the exclusion of all other moments, but without exemplifying tensed properties like present-ness.

This might not convince everyone that there is a fruitful distinction to be made between present moments which *merely* enjoy existential privilege, and those which enjoy existential and tensed privilege. However, there doesn't seem to be any reason to suppose that this *could not* be so. This is some reason to think that there is nothing which forbids making such a distinction. Think about the matter like so: it seems that we can imagine the present moment, under presentism, lacking the property of *present-ness* in a way that we could never have the present moment, *under presentism*, lacking existential privilege.

4.

4.1. Getting Back to the Debate

The distinction between tensed and tenseless presentism permits an explanation for how it is that the possibility of L-style time machines allows the tenseless version of presentism to avoid the bite of the Suicide Machine Argument, despite its failure to shield the tensed version of presentism from Hales' argument. My first task is to explain why it is that L-style time machines lack the capacity to bring about past moments specifically in a tensed presentist universe; then in the next part of this section, I explain why the L-style time machine blocks the Suicide Machine Argument. After explaining why it is that an L-style time machine succeeds, in response to the Suicide Machine Argument, I argue that this distinction permits another way to highlight the distinction between tensed and tenseless presentism.

The claim that p is possible (whereas the claim that p is impossible, just means that necessarily not-p, where bivalence holds), is a far more modest, especially if the matter is not obvious either way, than the claim that p is *never* possible; and, because of the immodesty of the latter claim, compared to the modesty of the former, the latter claim requires a good argument in its favor, if we are to accept it.

4.2. The Contradictory Argument

Consider a crudely sketched argument that an L-style time machine cannot successfully operate in a *tensed* presentist universe. The argument amounts to the following:

If the moment is from the past, then it exemplifies past-ness, as a past moment; but, since it's the only moment, it has existential privilege, as the present moment. So, the moment counts as both past and present. However, this cannot be so. Thus, there cannot be a successful L time machine, operating in a tensed presentist universe.¹²

Call this the contradictory argument.

Let me explain the contradictory argument in detail, by way of an example.

Suppose that Mary travels to the past, in an L-style time machine, in a tensed presentist universe. So, the time machine creates, and then destroys, all the moments connecting the departure and destination moments. But it's not clear how the L-style time machine is supposed to proceed. If it brings about the destination moment, it will count as the present moment in an existential sense: *the moment exists to the exclusion of every other moment*. If time traveling took place in a tenseless presentist universe, then there is nothing to fear from the contradictory argument. However, this time traveling is supposed to take place in a *tensed* presentist universe; there is the remaining matter of tense to accommodate. Surely, Mary is traveling to a moment in the *past*; the fact that she resides in that moment, doesn't thereby transform that moment into the present.

In tensed terms, the destination moment is a *past* moment; the destination moment exemplifies the property of past-ness. Consider that the destination moment that counts as the present moment because of its existential privilege, while, on tensed privilege, the same moment counts as a past moment. This should illustrate that while, on the tensed presentist conception of time travel, a moment is supposed to co-instantiate properties like being-the-past-moment and being-the-present-moment *in a metaphysical sense*,¹³ it should be clear that this cannot be done. This is, in part, because the presentist conception of time denies that

¹² This is not a problem for a *tensed eternalism*. This is because, in part, eternalism does not insist on the present moment exists to the exclusion of all other moments; that is, eternalism denies that the present moment *must* enjoy existential privilege. This is, in part, because privilege, whether tensed or existential, on the eternalist view of time, is not a metaphysical matter, but rather subjective and perspectival.

¹³ Eternalism has the theoretical resources to permit this sort of co-instantiation *in a subjective sense*; I could travel to a past moment, in an eternalist universe, which would count as the present moment, *relative to my perspective*.

there are, *or could be* past moments; so, for instance, it is not clear how the present moment could exemplify past-ness, on the presentist picture of time, given the presentist denial that there are any moments *whatsoever* that exemplify past-ness. This position, it should be added, is different from denying that there *were* moments, and were once present, and have since passed away.

Surely, the following is too hefty a bullet to bite:

Whenever you time travel, in a tensed presentist universe, the striking result is the following you both leave the present moment, and you don't. Call this *the co-instantiation problem*.

Clearly, an L-style time machine could not operate in a tensed presentist universe.

4.3. Understanding the Co-Instantiation Problem

The first thing to notice about the contradictory argument is just that it gets off the ground by creating a tension between existential and tensed privilege that is supposedly had by the present moment. If the present moment solely enjoyed tense privilege (or, alternatively, it solely enjoyed existential privilege), there wouldn't be different kinds of privilege to conflict with each other. For instance, eternalism as a theory of time, denies that there is anything like existential privilege. All moments (past, present, and future) are metaphysically equal; they are equally real, regardless of their location on the timeline; if there were an eternalist universe, in which every moment existed to the inclusion of every other moment, but with differing tensed properties, we would lack the resources to produce the co-instantiation problem.

Suppose that Smith travels in time to a past moment. This moment exemplifies the property of past-ness. But there is no requirement that this moment must exemplify existential privilege; it is not that the moment occupied by Smith exists to the exclusion of all other moments; rather, the present exists to the *inclusion* of all other moments. As such, if we start with a tensed version of eternalism (i.e. theory of time that all moments exist to the *inclusion* of every other moments, *and* that each moment exemplifies the appropriate tensed property), we cannot create a situation in which a single moment *both* counts as the present and past moment; there is no obvious way to produce the co-instantiation problem assuming that tensed privilege is the only kind of privilege available. The conclusion we should draw is that on a tensed version of eternalism, we do not have the necessary conditions to produce the co-instantiation problem.

4.4. Understanding Tenseless Presentism

Consider a timeline that only has existential privilege: the present moment exists to the exclusion of all other moments. This is a *tenseless* version of presentism simply because only the present moment and its occupants exist, to the exclusion of all other moments, but the present moment doesn't exemplify any tensed properties like present-ness. But, without combining the tensed and existential privileges, we cannot bring about the co-instantiation problem. There could not be a moment it exemplifies conflicting tensed and existential privilege simply because in the relevant universe, there is no tense privilege to be had.

It might clarify, if we consider a passage from Licon:

Suppose that in a presentist universe, Sally enters a time machine, twirls the knobs to a time in the past and activates the machine. The time machine then proceeds to instantiate each moment between the departure moment and arrival moment (all of which meet the indiscernibility of identity), each to the exclusion of all other moments. Sally eventually arrives at her destination, and exits the time machine.¹⁴

This passage is meant to clarify that an L-style time machine has the capacity to transform the present moment from, on the one hand, instantiating the departure moment, to, on the other hand, instantiating the destination moment, while taking the right steps in-between; an L-style time machine can do all of this, without producing the co-instantiation problem that plagues the tensed version of presentism. If the time machine respects the existential privilege of the present moment, then without tensed privilege, there is no way to produce the co-instantiation problem. There are no obvious impediments to an L-style time machine, operating properly in a *tenseless* presentist universe. The Suicide Machine Argument fails to motivate a reasonable worry as to the supposed suicidal nature of time travel, in a tenseless presentist universe.

5.

5.1. Some Final Assessments

Finally, in the last section, I want to explain why the Suicide Machine Argument is still a serious challenge to the prospect of time travel, in a *tensed* presentist universe; part of the explanation is that time travel, in a tensed presentist universe, is subject to the co-instantiation problem; as we have seen, there cannot be a time machine that is capable of traveling through time, operating in a *tensed* presentist

¹⁴ Licon, "Still No Suicide," 150.

Dissecting the Suicide Machine Argument: Insights from the Hales – Licon Debate universe. The tensed presentist is vulnerable to the main thrust of the Suicide Machine Argument.

Recall that the Suicide Machine Argument amounts to this:

First, (i) if anything exists in time, on the presentist conception, then it must exist in the present moment; second, (ii) time travelers relocate themselves in a moment, other than the present, if they are actually traveling in time¹⁵; hence, (iii), the time traveler, ceases to exist, just in virtue of her leaving the present moment, to travel to a past/future moment.

5.2. Comparing Tensed and Tenseless Presentism

Licon's strategy, to defuse this argument, is to deny the plausibility of the second premise of the argument. He accomplishes this by conceiving of a possible time machine that is capable of rearranging the present moment, and all the energy and matter which occupies the present, such that the present goes from instantiating the departure moment to instantiating the destination moment, along with all of the appropriate in-between steps. But, if we are dealing with time travel, in a tensed presentist universe, the Licon strategy fails. The Suicide Machine Argument is still effective obstacle, when it comes to time travel in a *tensed* presentist universe; this is because the tensed presentist cannot explain why it is that she rejects that leaving the present moment would result in the annihilation of the time traveler; but, the prospect of time travel in a *tenseless* presentist universe remains unscathed by the Suicide Machine Argument.

5.3. Summing Up

There are several quick points I want to make before concluding.

First, it should be clear that Hales' argument, barring other plausible objections, succeeds in that it gives us good reason to think that leaving the present, in a time machine, is tantamount to suicide, if we reside in a tensed, presentist universe; in that sense, Hales' argument is a success. This is good reason to suppose that tensed presentism is in serious trouble. Second, the lesson that the presentist should draw from all this is the following: if you want to avoid the Suicide Machine Argument, while remaining a faithful presentist, you should

¹⁵ The following is central to the Suicide Machine Argument: *if a moment is different, from the departure moment, it must be a non-present moment*. This is false (cf. Licon, "No Suicide"); if the present moment changes from exemplifying the departure moment, to exemplifying the destination moment, without introducing a second, co-existing moment, then the present moment can exemplify a different moment, to the one it previously exemplified, without having to introduce a non-present moment.

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abandon your commitment to *tense*; whatever advantage is had by adopting tensed presentism, it is had at the price of biting a large bullet: *time travel, in a tensed presentist universe, is a form of suicide.*

If you accept a tenseless version of presentism, then you can successfully travel in time in an L-style time machine;¹⁶ but, if you hold tensed presentism, either you are stuck with a kind of time travel which is, basically, just like a kind of suicide; or, the suicidal nature of time travel pressures you to abandon your commitment to tense.

¹⁶ For the sake of this paper, I assume toy physics.