

Time and Thisness

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I have argued elsewhere that there are facts, and possibilities, that are not purely qualitative.¹ In a second paper, however, I have argued that all possibilities are purely qualitative except insofar as they involve individuals that actually exist. In particular, I have argued that there are no thisnesses of nonactual individuals (where the thisness of x is the property of being x , or of being identical with x), and that there are no singular propositions about nonactual individuals (where a singular proposition about an individual x is a proposition that involves or refers to x directly, perhaps by having x or the thisness of x as a constituent, and not merely by way of x 's qualitative properties or relations to other individuals).² I am also inclined to believe that there are not yet any thisnesses of individuals that will exist but do not yet, nor any singular propositions about future individuals—and, hence, that all possibilities are purely qualitative except insofar as they involve individuals that already do exist or have existed (counting timeless individuals, if any, as already existing). This thesis about the relation of time to thisness is the subject of the present paper, in which the conclusions of my previous papers will be presupposed.

I. SOME ARGUMENTS FOR THE THESIS

A similar view has been maintained by Arthur Prior. "Julius Caesar," he said, "a certain now-identifiable individual, did at a certain time begin to exist. But before that time, the possible outcomes of what was going on did not include the starting-to-exist of *this* individual." What they did include was "the possibility that there should be *an* individual born to these parents" who would have the qualitative properties that Caesar actually had. We may begin by considering an argument Prior offers for this view:

Suppose there is some person living before the existence of Caesar or Antony who prophesies that there will begin to be a person who will be called "Caesar," who will be murdered, etc., and another person who will be called "Antony," who will dally with Cleopatra, etc. And then suppose this prophet to say, "No,

I'm not sure now that it *will* be like that—perhaps it is the *second* of the people I mentioned who will be called 'Caesar' and will be murdered, etc., and the first who will be born later and be called 'Antony', etc." This, it seems to me, really would be a spurious switch; and after Caesar and Antony had actually come into being and acted and suffered as prophesied, it would be quite senseless to ask "Are these, I wonder, really the two people he meant?" and if possible more senseless still to ask, "Is it—if either of them—our man's first prophecy, or his suggested alternative, that has now come to pass?"³

I think that virtually everyone will feel the intuitive appeal of Prior's contention that these questions are senseless; but the force of the argument needs to be explained.

Prior's explanation of why the questions are absurd, I take it, is that the prophet cannot have made his predictions about either the right or the wrong individuals because he cannot have predicted either that Caesar would be called "Caesar" and be murdered or that Antony would be called "Caesar" and be murdered. He cannot have predicted either of these things because to predict them would have been to assert certain singular propositions about Caesar and Antony, and those propositions did not yet exist and, therefore, were not available to be asserted by him at the time of the supposed prophecy. Here we can distinguish two claims:

- (1) The prophet could not yet assert any singular proposition about Caesar or Antony.
- (2) No singular proposition about Caesar or Antony existed yet.

It is (1) that provides an explanation of the absurdity of the question mentioned by Prior; and that fact will count as evidence for (1), unless a better explanation can be found. I think that Prior's implicit argument is that (1) is explained in turn by (2), and, therefore, the example is evidence for (2) as well as (1).

This is not a very powerful argument for (2). If the prophet was unable to assert any singular propositions about Caesar or Antony, the nonexistence of such propositions would surely not be the only plausible explanation of the fact. There already were such propositions, it might be said, but the prophet was cut off from them because no causal chain could have run from the then future individuals to his thoughts and utterances at that earlier time; Prior's argument has no force against this hypothesis.

Other issues could be raised about the argument. Is (1) true? Or, more generally, are singular propositions about future individuals *available* to us to be asserted, believed, or known now? Does (2) provide an explanation of (1)? Or, conversely, if we can now assert or believe singular propositions about future individuals, does it follow that those propositions already exist? These questions are of interest in their own right, and we will return to them in section IV; but our first order of business is to look at another, and I think better, argument for the thesis that thisnesses of future individuals, and singular propositions about them, do not yet exist.

I was born in 1937. Among the many metaphysically possible continuations of the actual history of the world up until, say, 1935, there are surely some in which I would never have existed. It is plausible to conclude that I could have failed to exist

even given everything that existed in 1935, or that had existed before then, or that exists timelessly—and, conversely, that all of those things could have existed even if I had never existed. But, as I have argued, neither my thisness nor any singular proposition about me exists in any metaphysically possible world in which I never exist; they are not among the things that could have existed even if I had never existed. It follows that they are not among the things that existed in 1935, or before, or that exist timelessly. My thisness, and singular propositions about me, cannot have preexisted me because if they had, it would have been possible for them to have existed even if I had never existed, and that is not possible.

I find this argument persuasive, but I do not want to exaggerate its force. It employs the principle,

- (3) For any beings x and y and time t , if x existed before t or exists timelessly, and y exists contingently and comes into existence at t , then it would be metaphysically possible for x to have existed even if y had never existed.

This principle is plausible. It is natural to think, for example, that it is quite open and undecided what people will come into existence in the future, even given everything that has existed up to now, and everything that exists timelessly; but this principle is not uncontroversial, and there are points at which we may want to raise questions about it.

In 1935, there existed millions of people who were born before I was, but that would not have been true if I had never existed. It may, therefore, be objected against (3) that in 1935, there existed something that could not, logically, have existed if I had not later come into existence—namely, a person that was born before I was. The correct reply to this objection is that a person that was born before I was is not, in the relevant sense, something that could not have existed if I never did. Such a person (Montgomery Furth, for example) could perfectly well have existed without my coming along afterward—although in that case, of course, he could not have had the property of being born before I was. What is true in the objection is that the existential generalization “There existed in 1935 a person that was born before I was” is, in fact, true but that it could not have been true (indeed, could not even have existed) if I had never existed. But principle (3) is not concerned with such generalizations. It is concerned, rather, with possibilities *de re* about the existence of beings that instantiate such generalizations in some possible worlds and not in others.

An inventive objector will not be stopped by this reply. It may be suggested, for example, that *Furth's living before Adams was born* is something that did exist in 1935 but that could not have existed if I never had. Some may doubt, of course, whether this is something that is properly said to “exist” at all. But rather than getting into a debate about the criterion for admitting types of entities to the category of “existents,” let us allow that *Furth's living in 1935* did exist in 1935. That concession does not undermine principle (3), for Furth's living in 1935 could have existed even if I had not come along later. And, perhaps, *Furth's living (in 1935) before I was born* is nothing more nor less than Furth's living in 1935, characterized in terms of a relation that it, in fact,

has but that it could have lacked. If Furth's living (in 1935) before I was born is something more than that, a distinct existent, I am inclined to view it as constructed from Furth's living in 1935 and my birth in 1937, and to say that it did not exist before I did. An issue arises here, of the time at which transtemporal relations exist, about which I will have more to say in the next section.

I have mentioned timeless existence in (3) because thisnesses and singular propositions might be classified as abstract objects, and many philosophers think that abstract objects exist timelessly rather than at any time. It may be controversial to apply a principle such as (3) to timeless entities. But it seems to me very odd to classify as timeless a being that, though it may be immune to certain kinds of change, depends metaphysically for its existence on something that occurs at a certain time, so that it has to wait until that time, so to speak, to be assured of existence. Suppose you are considering whether to have children; in such a case, you assume that your future children may never exist, in a sense in which it is no longer true that you may never exist. If you agree with me about the metaphysical dependence of thisnesses on individuals, you will also assume that the thisnesses of your future children may never exist, in a sense in which it is no longer true that your thisness may never exist. Would it not be odd to classify as timeless something of which it is first true and later false that it may never exist?

This depends, no doubt, on the sense of 'may'. The sense in which your future children and their thisnesses may never exist is not just that there are possible worlds in which they do not. For it is still true that there are possible worlds in which you and your thisness do not exist, whereas it is not still true, in the relevant sense, that you and your thisness *may* never exist. Those who are most strongly inclined to reject (3), and to hold that thisnesses and singular propositions exist timelessly, may think that the relevant sense of 'may' here cannot be anything but epistemic. *For all you know*, your future children and their thisnesses may never exist, but you know that you and your thisness do exist. I think, however, that there is more to it—that when we say that your future children and their thisnesses may never exist, we (or at any rate I) mean that it is not merely unknown, but metaphysically open and unsettled, whether they will exist. The merely epistemic difference would hardly keep us from thinking of thisnesses as existing timelessly, but something that is first open and later settled, metaphysically, does not seem timeless.

It emerges quite clearly here that my position, like Prior's, rests on an intuition that the future, or an important part of it, is metaphysically open in a way that the present and the past are not. This is a widely shared, but controversial, intuition. Principle (3) can be seen as a partial specification of the way in which the future is to be thought of as metaphysically open. I suspect, myself, that it is too strong a specification. Maybe there are stronger bonds of metaphysical necessity between earlier and later things than it allows. Perhaps, indeed, there must be, if causal determination of later events by earlier events is to be understood. The thesis I am defending, however, is one that appeals mainly to indeterminists, who think that many events, presumably including the coming into existence of most persons, are not causally determined by earlier events. For such events, we want to exclude the sort of bonds of metaphysical

necessity that (3) excludes. And to individuals coming into being in such events, the argument based on (3), that their thisnesses do not exist until they do, may be seen as applying.⁴

II. THISNESSES OF PAST INDIVIDUALS

The question naturally arises, whether the same things I am saying about future things that do not yet exist should not also be said about past things that no longer exist. I think not; there is a better case for thisnesses of past than of future individuals.

Perhaps an objector will offer me the mirror image of the argument that I find persuasive against thisnesses of future individuals. Any example we choose of an individual that exists no longer may be subject to doubts—that it is really immortal, or that it was not really an individual. I choose an example that I believe was an individual that no longer exists: the first pain that I felt on the one occasion when I was stung by a wasp. Let *i* be that pain (or anything *you* believe was an individual that no longer exists). Now the objector will say, “Surely everything that now exists could still have existed—numerically, and not just qualitatively, the same—even if the history of the world before now had been very different—in particular, even if *i* had never existed. So if the thisness of *i* is among the things that exist now, it could have existed even if *i* had never existed. Since you deny the latter, you should also deny the former.” This argument does not persuade me, because I do not believe that the same things could, logically and metaphysically, have existed now no matter what had existed earlier. There is a temporal asymmetry in our modal intuitions here. It is very plausible to say that the existence and identity of anything that exists now cannot depend logically or metaphysically on anything occurring later, but much less plausible to say that it cannot depend on what occurred earlier. Indeed, theses making the identity of individuals depend logically or metaphysically on various facts about their origins or antecedents have great intuitive appeal to many of us. Hence, I have no strong objection to saying that the thisness of *i* exists now without *i* existing now, but that if *i* had not existed earlier, that would have been impossible.

Whatever may be the case regarding future individuals, it seems that thisnesses of past individuals, and more particularly singular propositions about them, are still *available* to us as objects of propositional attitudes. We think that we can entertain, assert, and believe singular propositions about individuals that no longer exist. The possibility of our asserting and believing singular propositions about George Washington and Abraham Lincoln, for example, is not thought to depend in any way on the truth of immortality.

It is tempting to argue from the present availability of thisnesses of past individuals and singular propositions about them to their present *existence*. If we can entertain, assert, and believe singular propositions about individuals that no longer exist, must not these propositions exist? But I think we must be as cautious about this argument from present availability to present existence as we were about Prior’s implicit inference from present *unavailability* to present *nonexistence*. For there certainly are relations that can obtain between things that exist or occur only at different times. For

example, a brush fire in September may *cause* a mud slide the following January. Perhaps entertaining, asserting, and believing are relations that can obtain between thoughts or utterances occurring at one time and propositions that exist only at earlier times.

There is a difficulty in this hypothesis of continued availability without continued existence, however. Suppose I am sitting in the dentist's chair, i' is a particular pain I felt five minutes ago, and i'' is a particular pain I am feeling now. Surely I can entertain, and indeed believe, the singular proposition about i' and i'' , that i'' is more intense than i' . But when does this proposition exist? If singular propositions can exist after individuals they are about have ceased to exist, then this proposition can exist as soon as i'' begins to exist, although i' no longer exists then. But if singular propositions about an individual exist only when that individual exists, the proposition that i'' is more intense than i' cannot exist at any time, since there is no time at which both i' and i'' exist.

To be sure, this difficulty is analogous to difficulties we cannot escape in any event. If a brush fire in September causes a mud slide in January, when does the causal relation between them exist? If a relation cannot exist at a time when one of the terms it relates does not exist, then this causal relation cannot exist at any time. Perhaps it is a mistake to think of transtemporal relations as existing *at* a time at all; perhaps they do not need a time to exist at. On the other hand, they seem poor candidates for timelessness, since they depend for their existence on things that occur only at certain times, and they must therefore wait until those times to be assured of existence, as I have put it.⁵ Maybe they exist—whole in the whole, but not whole in the part—in an extended period of time; on this view, the causal relation between the brush fire and the mud slide would exist in the period from September to January, but not *at* any instant or *on* any day during the period. Similarly, we could say that singular propositions about individuals that exist only at disjoint times exist in an extended period, but not at any instant within the period. It would be simpler, however, to just allow that singular propositions continue to exist after individuals they are about have ceased to exist.

The one compelling reason for denying that thisnesses of past individuals, and singular propositions about them, still exist would be the belief that the thisnesses and the singular propositions have the individuals themselves as essential constituents. One hesitates to hold it as a universal law that an entity cannot occur at a time when one of its essential constituents does not exist; a performance of a symphony is occurring while the second movement is being performed, even though other essential parts of the performance are not occurring at that time. But we would not expect thisnesses and singular propositions to be related to time in the same way as musical performances. If individuals are constituents of their thisnesses, then presumably there exist thisnesses neither of past nor of future individuals. In that case, the difference between thisnesses of past and of future individuals is not in their existence, but, at most, in their availability. If thisnesses do not have the individuals themselves as constituents, however, I see no convincing argument for denying that thisnesses of past individuals still exist, and some advantage in holding that they do.

III. EXISTING AT A TIME

This is a natural point at which to pause for an examination of one of the central concepts of the present discussion, the concept of existing *at* a particular time. My previous essays in actualism have produced no divergence from Quine's dictum "To be is to be a value of a bound variable." $\lceil (\exists y)(y = x) \rceil$ is equivalent to the one-place propositional function $\lceil x \text{ exists} \rceil$. For actualism, the two-place propositional function $\lceil x \text{ exists in } w \rceil$, where w is a possible world, is not primitive but is understood as meaning that $\lceil (\exists y)(y = x) \rceil$, or $\lceil x \text{ exists} \rceil$, is included in the world-story⁶ of w , or that x would have existed if w had been actual. (Here 'would have existed' is a form of the ordinary one-place predicate 'exists'.) But $\lceil x \text{ exists at } t \rceil$, where t is a time, is a two-place propositional function for which actualism, as I understand it, provides no such reduction.

A reduction is offered by a view that is sometimes called "presentism" by analogy with "actualism." As the actualist holds that there are no merely possible things, but only things that actually exist, so the presentist holds that there are no merely past or future things, but only things that exist now. For presentism, 'exists' in its sole primitive sense is a one-place predicate equivalent to 'actually exists now', and the presentist's primitive quantifiers range only over things that actually exist now. And as the actualist may say that there are, in the actual world, primitive facts of the form $\lceil \text{It could have been the case that } p \rceil$, even though there are no nonactual things that could have existed, so the presentist may say that there are, now, primitive facts of the form $\lceil (n \text{ years ago}) \text{ it was the case that } p \rceil$ and/or $\lceil (n \text{ years from now}) \text{ it will be the case that } p \rceil$, even though there are no nonpresent things that did or will exist. On this view, $\lceil x \text{ existed in 1935} \rceil$ can be understood as equivalent to $\lceil \text{In 1935, it was the case that } (\exists y)(y = x) \rceil$, where 'in 1935' is subject to further reduction.

Presentism complicates the treatment of transtemporal relations. Let us say that x causes* y if and only if x and y exist at disjoint times and x causes y .

$$(4) (\exists x)(\exists y)(x \text{ causes* } y)$$

seems to be true; but the presentist cannot accept it as it stands. For by the very meaning of $\lceil x \text{ causes* } y \rceil$, (4) cannot be true unless its quantifiers range over things that exist at disjoint times; whereas the presentist's quantifiers range only over things that exist at the present time. Presentism's nearest equivalent of (4) will be something like

$$(5) \text{ It was, is, or will be the case that } (\exists y)(\exists \phi)(\sim(\exists x) [y \text{ is occurring because it was the case that } \phi(x)] \ \& \ y \text{ is occurring because it was the case that } (\exists z)(\phi(z))).$$

This complication of transtemporal relations might be acceptable if supported by strong enough metaphysical intuitions. Actualism requires analogous complications in the treatment of modality. But actualism rests, I believe, on strong intuitions to the effect that modal facts must have their whole ontological basis in the actual world, and that the ontological basis of the fact that there could have been, for example, a huge battle fought at Arcola, Illinois, on June 18, 1978, is not something that is

or could have been a battle. The corresponding metaphysical basis for presentism would be the view that facts about the past and future must have their whole ontological basis in the present, and that the ontological basis of the fact that an important battle was fought at Waterloo on June 18, 1815, is not something that is or was a battle. This view about time, however, unlike the corresponding view about possibility, seems strongly counterintuitive. Surely the ontological basis of the fact I mentioned about Waterloo is, or includes, something that was a battle and that does not exist now and is not occurring now.

I am therefore inclined to reject presentism and to suppose that our quantifiers should be understood as ranging, at least, over past as well as present things. This leaves us, however, with $\ulcorner x \text{ exists at (a time) } t \urcorner$ as a primitive two-place propositional function that must be distinguished from $\ulcorner (\exists y)(y = x) \urcorner$.

IV. NAMES FOR FUTURE INDIVIDUALS

I promised to return to the question whether we can assert, believe, or know singular propositions about future individuals that do not yet exist. It has recently been suggested that we can; and the suggestion is couched in terms of the technical concept of a "rigid designator," which must first be explained. In explaining it, I will make use of a distinction I have developed elsewhere between truth *at* and truth *in* a possible world.⁷ A singular proposition about an individual x cannot be true *in* a world in which x would not exist, because the proposition also would not exist there. But we can say that it is true *at* such a world if it correctly characterizes that world from our vantage point in the actual world. For instance, the singular proposition that I do not exist is true *at*, but not *in*, possible worlds in which I would not exist.

A name or other expression n *rigidly* designates an object x if and only if n designates x at (though not necessarily *in*) every possible world.⁸ 'Robert Merrihew Adams', for example, rigidly designates me. I am what it designates at every possible world, including worlds in which I would not have existed. It does this designating, however, in the actual world, and, indeed, only in a certain "language" or "dialect." There could possibly, and may actually, be people who use 'Robert Merrihew Adams' as a name of some other person, or perhaps of a lake or a river. On the other hand, 'the chairperson of the UCLA philosophy department in 1978' designates me, but not rigidly. There are possible worlds in which David Kaplan bears the burden of satisfying that particular description.

There are also indexical and demonstrative expressions, such as 'I' and 'this', which rigidly designate different individuals in different contexts. On any given occasion of use, they designate the same individual at all possible worlds; but on different occasions, they designate different individuals, according to the context.

What proposition a sentence expresses depends on whether its terms designate rigidly. Thus, it is because 'Robert Merrihew Adams' rigidly designates me that 'Robert Merrihew Adams does not exist' expresses a proposition that is true at all and only those possible worlds in which I would not exist. In order to express a singular proposition about an individual, a sentence must normally contain a rigid designator for that individual.

It is widely held that once we have grasped the concept of rigid designation, we can introduce rigid designators simply by giving a description that is satisfied by exactly one thing and *stipulating* that the name we introduce is to designate rigidly the thing that in fact satisfies that description. In such a case, the description is said to “fix the reference” of the name. But, normally, it is not analytically equivalent to the name, for the name designates its object even at worlds in which the object would have failed to satisfy the description.

This brings us to the idea that particularly concerns us here, which is that in this way, we can introduce proper names that rigidly designate *future* individuals. In David Kaplan’s elegant example, we introduce the name ‘Newman 1’ by declaring, “I hereby dub the first human being to be born in the twenty-first century ‘Newman 1’.”⁹ Having done so, it might seem, we can already express, assert, and believe singular propositions about the first child of the twenty-first century, if there will be exactly one such person. By assertively uttering ‘Newman 1 will be bald’, for instance, we can express, and assert, a singular proposition about Newman 1, that he or she will be bald—or so it has been claimed.¹⁰ Here we face two issues: whether we can indeed express, assert, and believe singular propositions about future individuals in this way; and whether, if we can, that shows that there do after all exist singular propositions about future individuals.

Let us begin with the second issue, the one about existence. We have already observed that there are relations that obtain between things that exist at disjoint times. It was this that kept us from regarding the present existence of singular propositions about past individuals as proved by the fact that we entertain, assert, and believe such propositions; and I think it should also keep us from inferring the present existence of singular propositions about future individuals from the fact (if it is a fact) that we can entertain, assert, or believe them. For perhaps the relations of entertaining, asserting, and believing can obtain between thoughts and utterances occurring at one time and propositions existing only at a later time. Maybe an utterance occurring in 1985 could express, and be an assertion of, a proposition that will not exist until 2001. Likewise, it has not been shown that the utterance of a rigid designator in 1985 could not express a thisness that will not come into being until the next century.

If by uttering ‘Newman 1 will be bald’ now, we express a proposition that will not come into being until fifteen years or so from now, it follows that what proposition, if any, we express now depends on what happens much later. But that is exactly as it should be in this example. Those who think that utterances of ‘Newman 1 will be bald’ in 1985 express a singular proposition about Newman 1 would certainly agree that what proposition that is depends on obstetrical events at the turn of the twenty-first century.

Those who believe that we can assert and believe singular propositions about future individuals in this way can answer Prior’s argument against their opinion. For they have an alternative explanation of why it would be absurd for Prior’s prophet to ask whether “perhaps it is the *second* of the people I mentioned who will be called ‘Caesar’ and will be murdered, etc., and the first who will be born later and be called ‘Antony’, etc.” If we are to make sense of the question at all, or of Prior’s argument,

we must take it that 'the *second* of the people I mentioned' and 'the first' are meant to be rigid designators (rather like demonstratives) designating the mentioned individuals both at worlds in which they satisfy the descriptions in the order in which they were originally given, and at worlds in which their roles are reversed. Indeed, they presumably designate the same individuals at more widely variant worlds as well; for surely the prophet would be prepared to say, 'It could have been, though it won't be, that both the first and the second of the people I mentioned die of natural causes'. In the actual world, therefore, according to the prophet's intention, 'the second of the people I mentioned' designates the same individual at worlds in which he satisfies either of the two descriptions, or neither of them. It does not follow, however, that the actual world may turn out to be one in which he satisfies the first description instead of the second. For if 'the second of the people I mentioned' is a rigid designator here, its reference is fixed by the second description the prophet gave. According to the convention by which it is introduced, 'the second of the people I mentioned' designates at all possible worlds the individual (if there will be exactly one) who satisfies the prophet's second description in the actual world. That is why the suggestion that perhaps he (actually) will fail to satisfy it is senseless, though it is correct to say that he *could have* failed to satisfy it. This, at any rate, is the answer that ought to be given to Prior by anyone who thinks we can use rigid designators to assert singular propositions about future individuals.

Similar things can be said about 'Newman 1'. Because the reference of 'Newman 1' is fixed by the description 'the first human child born in the twenty-first century', it makes no sense to ask whether perhaps Newman 1 will really be born in the twentieth century. We can know on purely semantical grounds (and, hence, perhaps *a priori*) that

- (6) Newman 1 will be the first human child born in the twenty first century

expresses a true proposition, if it expresses any proposition at all, and that

- (7) Newman 1 will be born in the twentieth century

expresses a false proposition if it expresses any proposition at all. But

- (8) $\Diamond$ (Newman 1 will be born in the twentieth century)

expresses a truth if it expresses any proposition at all; for if there will be exactly one first child of the twenty-first century, he or she will doubtless be born only a few second after midnight on the first morning of the century, and could surely have been born five minutes sooner.

Keith Donnellan has recently presented a better argument than Prior's against the view that we can assert, believe, or know singular propositions about future individuals. Donnellan deals explicitly with the 'Newman 1' example, focusing on the claim that (6) expresses a truth that we can know *a priori*. He agrees, in effect, that we could introduce the name 'Newman 1' by stipulating that it rigidly designates the first human being born in the twenty-first century, and that if we did, it would designate that individual, if there turns out to be exactly one such person.

Let us now imagine that just after midnight on New Century's Eve a child is born who is firmly established to be the first born of the century. He is baptised "John," but those of us who are still around, remembering our stipulation, also call this child "Newman 1." Now it seems to me that it would be outrageous to say that some twenty-five years or so before his birth, we knew that John would be the first child born in the 21st century. Suppose one of us, living to a ripe old age, were to meet John after he has grown up a bit. Would it be true to say to John, "I call you 'Newman 1' and Newman 1, I knew some twenty-five years or so before your birth that you would be the first child born in the 21st century"?'¹¹

Donnellan's view of this case is that by virtue of having introduced the name 'Newman 1' in the way described, we can know (perhaps even *a priori*) that if there will be exactly one first child born in the twenty-first century, the sentence 'Newman 1 will be the first child born in the twenty-first century' expresses a truth, but that we cannot know the truth of what is expressed by the sentence. He suggests that "we are in the somewhat odd position of possessing a mechanism for introducing a name that rigidly designates something, but a mechanism that is not powerful enough to allow us to use the name!"¹² We cannot *use* the name in the sense that having the name in our language does not put us "in a position to have *de re* propositional attitudes toward the entity rigidly designated" by it. It does not enable us to know or believe, nor even to assert, any proposition expressed by means of it. For it would be "just as incorrect to say to . . . the first child born in the 21st century, 'I believed about you some twenty-five years before your birth . . .', 'I asserted about you some twenty-five years before your birth . . .', etc.," as to say to him 'I knew about you some twenty-five years before your birth . . .'"¹³

I think it is clear, intuitively that Donnellan is right in holding that it would not be true to say any of these things to the first child of the twenty-first century, on the basis of our "use" of 'Newman 1'. But several explanations could be offered of *why* he is right about this. We shall consider four.

(i) Donnellan's own explanation—or partial explanation, as he himself suggests—is that in order for an entity to be an object of a *de re* propositional attitude, "the entity must enter into the 'genetic' account of how the speaker [or thinker] came to acquire the name, the beliefs he would express using the name, etc."¹⁴ Since future entities that do not yet exist cannot enter into such genetic accounts of our present thoughts and utterances, such entities cannot be objects of present propositional attitudes *de re*. Singular propositions about them cannot now be asserted or believed. Donnellan adds,

Having indicated the direction in which I am inclined to go, I find myself wanting to ask the question, why, if indeed it is true, is one in a position to assert and know *de re* things about an entity when the entity becomes (in the right way) a part of the history of one's use of the name? What does *that* accomplish that allows for this possibility? But perhaps that is a misconceived question. Perhaps the only answer is that that is just when we do ascribe *de re* propositional attitudes.¹⁵

(ii) It is also possible to offer an explanation that is consistent with the claim that we can have knowledge and beliefs *de re*, and can make assertions *de re*, about future individuals. Suppose there will be exactly one first child of the twenty-first century, and about a month before her birth, her parents will begin to call her "Jan," having decided to call her "Jan" whatever her sex turns out to be. Suppose further that at 11:30 P.M. on the last night of the twentieth century, her parents believe

(9) Jan will be born in the twentieth century.

At that time, if these suppositions are correct, (9) will certainly express a singular proposition, and one that the parents can believe and assert. As it will turn out (if our suppositions are correct), this singular proposition will also be the proposition expressed by

(7) Newman 1 will be born in the twentieth century.

Will Jan's parents therefore believe (7)? Certainly not. Being knowledgeable (as we may suppose) about the analytical philosophy of the 1970s and 1980s, they will know, on purely semantical grounds, that (7) expresses a falsehood, if it expresses any proposition at all.

We find ourselves in a familiar situation, which does not always involve future individuals. To take the most hackneyed example, where 'Phosphorus' is a (rigidly designating) name for the Morning Star, and 'Hesperus' for the Evening Star, it seems that many people have known

(10) Hesperus = Hesperus

without knowing

(11) Phosphorus = Hesperus

—even though (10) and (11) express the same singular proposition. Here it is assumed that a singular proposition is constituted by one or more individuals, or their thisnesses, together with one or more qualities or relations, and logical connectives, in such a way that there could not be two distinct singular propositions of exactly the same logical structure in which exactly the same qualities or relations are held to be satisfied by exactly the same ordered *n*-tuples of individuals.

In order to provide a plausible solution for problems of this sort, I believe we must say that the objects of propositional attitudes *de re* are not always singular propositions in this sense. There are several philosophical theories in the field that could provide us with alternative objects for the attitudes. They are all too complicated to be developed here; perhaps the simplest to mention is the view that the objects of assertion and belief are sentences.¹⁶ Whatever theory is adopted, it ought, I think, to accommodate the following: In some contexts, what people are said to have believed or asserted *de re* depends only on what singular proposition (in my sense) is expressed by their thought or utterance. If I say, "I was born in Philadelphia," for instance, and you say, "Robert Merrihew Adams was born in Philadelphia," we will commonly be held to have asserted the same thing. But, in other contexts, what people are said to know

or believe or assert depends also on other features of their state of mind or utterance or its context. If I were suffering from amnesia and had read a biography of myself without realizing it was about me, I might know that Robert Merrihew Adams was born in Philadelphia without knowing that *I* was born in Philadelphia.¹⁷

Whatever theory is adopted, it seems likely that it could be used to explain our intuitive data consistently with the doctrine that *de re* assertions, belief, and knowledge about future individuals are possible. If the first child of the twenty-first century will be named 'Jan,' why wouldn't it be correct for us to say, after her birth, 'We knew twenty years ago that Newman 1 would be the first child of the twenty-first century, but we did not know twenty years ago that Jan would be the first child of the twenty-first century'—and to Jan, 'We did not know twenty years ago that *you* would be the first child of the twenty-first century'? And if it would be correct for us to say these things, why wouldn't the three 'that' clauses still express the same singular proposition? After all, there have been people who did not know that Phosphorus = Hesperus, although they knew that Hesperus = Hesperus, and those two sentences express the same singular proposition (in my sense of 'singular proposition').

(iii) Both Donnellan and the position just discussed agree that 'Newman 1' can now be used to express singular propositions about the first child to be born in the twenty-first century, if there will be exactly one such child. The other two views to be considered here deny this. One of them regards 'Newman 1' as expressing not the thisness of an individual but an essence of an individual. If the first child of the twenty-first century will be Jan, then on this view, 'Newman 1' will express not the property of being identical with Jan but some other property necessarily coextensive with it—perhaps the property of being the first human child born in the twenty-first century in α , where ' α ' rigidly designates the actual world. This, of course, will not keep 'Newman 1' from rigidly designating Jan.

This alternative treatment would be metaphysically interesting if we could suppose that 'Newman 1' expresses a *purely qualitative* essence, but that is doubtful. It is far from clear that 'human', 'twenty-first century', and, above all, ' α ' have purely qualitative equivalents. Indeed ' α ' may introduce worse problems than 'Newman 1'. At least there will be a time when it will be settled which individual, if any, 'Newman 1' designates; but if the actual world will go on forever, will there ever be a time at which it is settled which possible world ' α ' designates?

(iv) It is possible to regard 'Newman 1' as a variable bound by an existential quantifier that in most contexts is not expressed. On this view, for example,

- (8) $\Diamond(\text{Newman 1 will be born in the twentieth century})$

is an informal abbreviation of

- (12) It will be the case that $(\exists x)(x \text{ is the first human child born in the twenty-first century} \ \& \ \Diamond(x \text{ is born in the twentieth century}))$.

And, in general, $\lceil \phi(\text{Newman 1}) \rceil$ will be regarded as an informal abbreviation of

- (13) It will be the case that $(\exists x)(x \text{ is the first human child born in the twenty-first century} \ \& \ \phi(x))$.

This treatment of 'Newman 1' does not disturb the point that 'Newman 1' is a rigid designator; for it is well known that variables designate rigidly within any context of use.¹⁸ In (12), for example, it is crucial that within the scope of the existential quantifier, x designates or represents the same individual at the actual world and at all other possible worlds, including one in which that individual is born in a different century. But (12) is a general proposition and is clearly distinct from the singular proposition that the first child of the twenty-first century would express by saying, "I might have been born in the twentieth century."¹⁹

I am not sure which, if any, of these four accounts of the use of 'Newman 1' is correct. But that is a semantical, rather than a metaphysical, issue. For most metaphysical purposes, the situation is clear enough. If there will be exactly one first child of the twenty-first century, there will be a singular proposition about him or her, that he or she is the first child of the twenty-first century. All of that we already know; and there is nothing more informative that the use of 'Newman 1' can enable us to know or believe now. If we try to express our knowledge in a form that looks more informative (e.g., 'that *you* would be the first child of the twenty-first century'), it becomes clear that in 2015, we could not rightly claim in that form to have known it now. Nevertheless, from the perspective of the twenty-first century, our present knowing and speaking will rightly be seen as standing in some transtemporal relations to the singular proposition that will exist then. Whether some of these relations should be regarded as expression, assertion, belief, and/or knowledge is a question that can be debated in semantics without, I think, affecting the metaphysical picture very much.²⁰

Notes

1. R. M. Adams, "Primitive Thisness and Primitive Identity," *The Journal of Philosophy* 76 (1979):5–26.
2. R. M. Adams, "Actualism and Thisness," *Synthese* 57 (1981):3–42.
3. A. N. Prior, "Identifiable Individuals," *Review of Metaphysics* 13 (June 1960):690.
4. Issues that arise about this argument are in several ways analogous to issues that have arisen in philosophical theology regarding the possibility or impossibility of divine foreknowledge of free human actions. Thus, the question whether *Furth's living before I was born* is something that existed in 1935 corresponds to the question whether it is a *fact* about 1935 that Furth was alive before I was born. Questions of the latter form, in the context of the foreknowledge problem, have given rise to considerable controversy about attempts to distinguish between "hard" and "soft" facts *about* a given time. [All the following articles appeared in *The Philosophical Review*: Nelson Pike, "Divine Omniscience and Voluntary Action," vol. 74 (1965):27–46, "Of God and Freedom: A Rejoinder," vol. 75 (1966):369–79, and "Fischer on Freedom and Foreknowledge," vol. 93 (1984):599–614; John Turk Saunders, "Of God and Freedom," vol. 75 (1966):219–25; Marilyn McCord Adams, "Is the Existence of God a 'Hard' Fact?" vol. 76 (1967):492–503; John Martin Fischer, "Freedom and Foreknowledge," vol. 92 (1983):67–79.] Likewise, the suggestion that thisnesses and singular propositions maybe timeless parallels the famous proposal that the foreknowledge problem could be solved by regarding God as timeless; I regard a solution in terms of timelessness as unpromising in both cases, for reasons that are somewhat similar. Perhaps the problem of the present paper is a form of the foreknowledge problem—if thisnesses are God's concepts of individuals. I would want to explore these connections more fully before coming to final conclusions about either problem, but this is not meant to be a paper about divine foreknowledge.
5. This is obviously an adaptation of an argument given in the previous section against the ascription of timelessness to the thisnesses of contingent individuals that come into existence. Principle (3) of the previous section also clearly requires that transtemporal relations not be allowed in general to exist timelessly.

6. The world-story of a possible world *w* is, roughly, the set of all those propositions that exist in the actual world and that would exist and would be true if *w* were actual. See my "Actualism and Thisness," 21–22.

7. R. M. Adams, "Actualism and Thisness," 20–32.

8. The term 'rigid designator' is due to Saul Kripke, but the interpretation presented here does not claim perfect conformity with any historic precedent.

9. This is a slightly modified version of an example first introduced by Kaplan in "Quantifying In," *Synthese* 19 (1968–69):201. In that paper, Kaplan rejected the possibility (or at least the propriety) of such a dubbing.

10. By David Kaplan, in a later paper, "Dthat," in *Syntax and Semantics*, vol. 9: *Pragmatics*, edited by Peter Cole (New York, 1978), 241.

11. Keith S. Donnellan, "The Contingent *A Priori* and Rigid Designators," in *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* 2 (Minneapolis, 1977), 20.

12. *Ibid.*, 24.

13. *Ibid.*, 23–24.

14. *Ibid.*, 25.

15. *Ibid.*

16. A recent sketch of a version of this view is found in Tyler Burge, "The Content of Propositional Attitudes: Abstract," *Nous* 14 (1980):53–58. Another approach is to ascribe different "nondescriptive connotations" to some sentences that differ (for instance) only by containing different proper names for the same individual; see Diana Ackerman, "Proper Names, Propositional Attitudes, and Non-Descriptive Connotations," *Philosophical Studies* 35 (1979):55–69, and "Proper Names, Essences, and Intuitive Beliefs," *Theory and Decision* 11 (1979):5–26. Alternatively, we might say that what people assert or believe often depends on other facts about the "character" of their thought or utterance, as well as on the proposition (in my sense) that constitutes its "content"; the distinction is drawn, with respect to sentences containing indexical expressions, by David Kaplan, "On the Logic of Demonstratives," *Journal of Philosophical Logic* 8 (1978):81–98.

17. This example, and argument, are adapted from John Perry, "Frege on Demonstratives," *The Philosophical Review* 86 (1977):474–97.

18. On this Kaplanesque point and its present application, see Nathan U. Salmon, "How *Not* to Derive Essentialism from the Theory of Reference," *The Journal of Philosophy* 76 (1979):708 n.

19. This treatment of 'Newman 1' is inspired by a similar treatment of proper names in fiction developed by Alvin Plantinga, *The Nature of Necessity* (Oxford, 1974), 159–63.

20. An analogous treatment of broader issues connected with the truth of statements about "future contingents" is worthy of consideration. (I do not mean that I am prepared to endorse it.) We could think of the meaning of the future tense as consisting largely in the way in which it determines transtemporal relations in which acts of speech or thought performed by means of it will rightly be seen as standing to future events when they have occurred. Among these relations might be *correctly predicting* or *being verified by* and, conversely, *being falsified by*. Could this relational understanding of the truth of statements about the future help in resisting the pressure to think of them as timelessly true? This is a pressure we may wish to resist if the timeless truth of such statements seems to us incompatible with a metaphysically open future.

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