

Reply to Kvanvig

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I find myself unmoved by Professor Kvanvig's arguments.¹ I will comment first on his critique of my argument for the thesis that thisnesses of individuals do not in general pre-exist the individuals, which he calls "the Temporal Dependency Thesis (TDT)"; then on his attempt to show that "our intuitions" do not support belief in the openness of the future more strongly than they support belief in an "analogous openness" of the past. In both of these main arguments it seems to me that Kvanvig devotes himself to establishing (what I never doubted) that there is a possible philosophical alternative to my position, but does little to shake my intuition that my position is more plausible.

My argument for TDT, as I said in "Time and Thisness" (p. 317),² "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."

I found the argument based on this principle "persuasive, but I [did] not want to exaggerate its force," because (3) "is not uncontroversial," though it seems plausible to me (p. 317). Kvanvig argues, in effect, that (3) can be denied by holding that "Just as the performance of a free action brings it about that [what was true] in the past [about the future] is different than it otherwise would have been, so the fact that a certain entity exists brings it about that [what thisnesses existed in] the past is different than it otherwise would have been." That is certainly a possible (and indeed a respectable) philosophical position. But (3) still seems to me the more plausible view, because of the appeal of the idea of metaphysically

¹ Jonathan L. Kvanvig, "Adams on Actualism and Presentism," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, this issue.

² Robert Merrihew Adams, "Time and Thisness," *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* 11 (1986): 315-29. Page references in parentheses in the text are to this paper.

possible continuations of the history of any possible world from any time t , whose variation (since they are continuations) can affect what beings contingently come into existence after t , but cannot affect what exists at or before t .

The main reason Kvanvig suggests for thinking otherwise is that a certain influential response to fatalistic arguments implies that things can be true about a time that would not have been true about it if (as was possible) things had gone differently at a later time. I grant this. My claim in (3) is only that whatever *exists* is the history of w up until t must be metaphysically compatible with any possible continuation of that history after t . In "Time and Thisness" (p. 317f.) I considered some objections to (3) based on the assumption that there are facts about 1935 (e.g., that Montgomery Furth was living then before I was born) that could not have obtained if I had not been born later. In the objections these facts are stated in the affirmative existential form that there existed in 1935 something of a certain sort. But I argued that we need not therefore admit to our primitive ontology any entity that existed in 1935 but could not (*de re*) have existed if I had not later come to be. We can analyze these cases, on a *de re* basis, in terms of entities (e.g., Furth, or Furth's living) that depend on later events for some of their properties, but not for their existence.

The other major argument in Kvanvig's paper presents a qualified defense of presentism, the view that "only the present is [now] fundamentally real." I call it a "qualified" defense because in the end Kvanvig seems committed only to the claim that presentism is at least as plausible as the view of the openness of the future that I have seen as grounding TDT. He thinks the latter claim tells against my argument for TDT. "For if presentism cannot be dismissed, there is some ground for thinking that the past participates in the very same openness which Adams appeals to in arguing for the TDT." But it seems to me that presentism does not in fact ascribe to the past "the very same openness" that I am inclined to ascribe to the future. For the latter openness consists in the compossibility of the actual present with a plurality of alternative futures. And presentism does not imply that the actual present is compossible with a plurality of alternative pasts. Presentism is as compatible as any theory could be with the view that the actual present metaphysically entails the actual past, in all its details. Indeed that view would facilitate the metaphysical construction of the actual past from the actual present, to which Kvanvig's presentist is committed. What presentism says about the past is not that it is open, but that it is ontologically parasitic on the present.

Be that as it may, I did argue in "Time and Thisness" (p. 321f.) that presentism has implausible implications, instancing one that Kvanvig formulates as,

- (P) The ontological basis of its being true that in the past a certain battle took place is not (now) something that is (now) or was (then) a battle.

Kvanvig rightly insists on distinguishing between two versions of (P): (Pa) in which the truth whose ontological basis is under discussion is "time-independent," and (Pb) in which it is "the fact that it is (now) true that a certain battle took place." Rightly, also, he points out that (Pb) is the interpretation on which the presentist will insist, so that the fact that "(Pa) is obviously false" does not tell against presentism.

(Pb), then, is the proposition I must attack; and I think (Pb) expresses what I meant to attack, though I did not distinguish (Pa) and (Pb). Kvanvig, however, claims that "Adams' argument must rely on (Pa) if that argument is to undermine presentism." His reason for saying this seems to be that "(Pb) presents an interesting and attractive claim, at least once we take off our eternalist-colored glasses which blind us to the distinction to which presentists wish to call our attention."

My reply is simply that I do not find (Pb) intuitively attractive at all; indeed that is roughly what I meant to be saying in attacking (P) in "Time and Thisness." I think my ordinary confident realism about the past includes a belief that what is *now* true about the battle of Waterloo has its ontological basis in something that was a battle. It will be hard to prove conclusively that I am not wearing eternalist-colored glasses, but I am not conscious of being an eternalist. That is, I am not committed to the view that the truth of propositions is always, or even generally, timeless.

I would note, finally, that what Kvanvig, in his first paragraph, quotes as my statement of what "actualism is" was not presented by me as a definition, but only as an implication, of actualism.