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DIRECT REFERENCE AND SINGULAR PROPOSITIONS

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I

Most direct reference theorists about indexicals and proper names have adopted the thesis that singular propositions are composed of physical objects and properties.[1] There have been a number of recent proponents of such a view, including Scott Soames, Nathan Salmon, John Perry, Howard Wettstein, and David Kaplan.[2] Since Kaplan is the individual who (at least recently) is best known for holding such a view, let's call a proposition that is composed of objects and properties a *K-proposition*. In this paper, I will attempt to show that (given some fairly plausible assumptions) a direct reference view about the content of proper names and indexicals leads very naturally to the position that all singular propositions are K-propositions.[3] Then, I will attempt to show that this view of propositions is false. I will spend the bulk of the paper on this latter task. My goal in the paper, then, is to show that adopting the direct reference thesis comes at a cost (or for those who thought it *already* came at a cost because of [alleged] problems the view has with problems such as opacity and the significance of some identity statements; it comes at even *more* of a cost).

Let's begin by examining the link between a direct reference view of singular terms and K-propositions. For many "New Theorists," the connection seems so obvious that they don't even pause to highlight how one might get from a direct reference view to the existence of K-propositions. For instance, in the preface to "Demonstratives" David Kaplan says, "If there are such terms [directly referring terms], then the proposition expressed by a sentence containing such a term would involve individuals directly rather than by way of the "individual concepts" or "manners of presentation" I had been taught to expect."[4] In "Naming Without Necessity," Joseph Almog takes the existence of K-propositions to be part of the Millian thesis.[5]

However, the link between direct reference and K-propositions can be spelled out fairly clearly. A direct reference view of the content of proper names and indexicals claims that the entire semantic content of one of these singular terms is its referent. So, the content of the term "Locke" in the following sentence

(1)   Locke is a philosopher.

simply is the man Locke himself. So, unlike the traditional Fregean view, there is no entity (a sense or property) that "intervenes" between the term "Locke" and

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the man Locke that plays any role in constituting the content of the term "Locke." The content of "Locke" is the referent of the term.[6,7]

Typically, philosophers distinguish between a particular sentence token and the content the sentence expresses. The latter often is taken to be a proposition, whereas the former is some sort of physical entity— e.g. a verbal utterance or marks on a page. There are, of course, many good reasons (which I won't go into here) for distinguishing between a sentence *qua* marks on a page and what a sentence means or says. Furthermore, often it is thought that the proposition a sentence expresses is a function of the contents of the sentence's component parts.[8] Call this claim "compositionality." For example, in (1), "Locke" has a certain content, and "is a philosopher" has a certain content; and the proposition expressed by (1) is determined by the contents of these two component parts plus relations that hold between the contents.[9] One way of accounting for this, many think, is that there is some sort of structural isomorphism between sentences and the propositions they express. Just as sentences are built up out of more primitive parts (e.g., a subject and a predicate), propositions are "built up" out of more primitive entities: the semantic contents of the individual parts of the sentences that express them. These assumptions are quite widely held, at least by those who take propositions to be structured entities, rather than simple abstract objects or sets of worlds.

Now we can see the relationship between a direct reference theory of proper names and indexicals and K-propositions. The direct reference theorist holds that the content of one of these singular terms is the term's referent. So, if the proposition expressed by a sentence is built up from the contents of the sentence's component parts,

the proposition expressed by a sentence with a proper name or indexical for a subject term (as in [1]) will have the referent of the subject term as a component part. Typically, it is thought that the content of the predicate of a sentence is a property.[10] In (1), it would be the property *being a philosopher*. Given this fact, our previous assumptions, and a direct reference theory about the content of the term "Locke," the proposition expressed by (1) will be composed of the man Locke and the property *being a philosopher*. The sentences that express singular propositions all have directly referring subject terms according to the direct reference theorist, so each of these sentences, like (1) (call them "singular sentences"), will express a K-proposition.

Note that it doesn't follow from this that *all* singular propositions are K-propositions. Perhaps there are some singular propositions not expressible in English that aren't. However, many direct reference theorists do move from the claim that all singular propositions expressible in English are K-propositions to the claim that all singular propositions are K-propositions. This inference is quite natural, and also quite reasonable: What is it about English that would keep us from expressing these other types of singular propositions? Let's call the view that all singular propositions are K-propositions *the K-thesis*.[11]

Now that we've seen why it's no accident that many New Theorists claim that singular propositions are K-propositions, let's examine the plausibility of the notion of K-propositions. Are there reasons to reject these sorts of entities? Arguably there are. One puzzle that immediately comes to mind has to do with the nature of a K-proposition. How can a proposition, which is supposed to be an abstract entity, have a physical object as a constituent? Indeed,

what exactly is it to say that Locke himself is a constituent of the proposition expressed by (1)?[12] It's not that the relationship of constituenthood *per se* is unclear. We can see how the proposition expressed by (1) would have *being a philosopher* as a constituent, rather than, say, *being a grape*. But, it's really difficult to see what this constituent relationship amounts to when we're talking about Locke himself and the proposition expressed by (1). Propositions are the objects of our propositional attitudes. But, how can I believe in Locke and a property? How can I entertain (in a non-festive sense) Locke and a property? The notion hardly seems to make sense.

However, perhaps we can make some sense of what it is for Locke to be a constituent of the proposition expressed by (1). We can note that it entails the counterfactual, *If Locke didn't exist, the proposition expressed by (1) wouldn't exist.* Furthermore, there are other relationships between *abstracta* and *concreta* that might help us understand the relationship between Locke and singular propositions about him.[13] Consider the relationship between a set and its members. A set is an abstract object.[14] Yet, a set is able to have members that are concrete. We seem to understand what it is for a set to have concrete members. Furthermore, (many think) there is a counterfactual claim that holds between a set and its members akin to the counterfactual claim that holds between a proposition and its constituents; namely, *If any of a set's members didn't exist, the set wouldn't exist.* So, can't sethood and memberhood help us to understand the relationship between Locke and singular propositions about him?

I would answer this question negatively, although it's tough to know what to say at this point. I have a clear idea of what it is

for a physical object to be a member of a set; however, I find the notion of an object's being a constituent of a proposition downright mysterious. But, clearly there are many who disagree with me on this (and who seem to have no problem with the notion of physical object being a constituent of a proposition).

However, even if one doesn't find the notion of a proposition having a physical object as a constituent problematic, K-propositions face other serious difficulties. These objections center on the fact that a K-proposition about a contingently existing object itself exists contingently. It seems plausible to say that a proposition has its constituents essentially. For example, the proposition expressed by (1) essentially has Locke as a constituent. However, this seems to entail (as we noted earlier), that if Locke hadn't existed, neither would the singular proposition expressed by (1). Clearly, Locke exists contingently. Therefore, since the singular proposition expressed by (1) essentially has Locke as a constituent, it too exists contingently. We can see that K-propositions are *object-dependent*; they are dependent for their existence on the objects they are about.

The fact that K-propositions about contingent objects themselves exist contingently can be used to construct powerful arguments against the notion of K-propositions. We will consider two such at arguments, at length, in the remainder of the paper.

II

Let's turn to an argument against the K-thesis.[15] This argument has been given by at least Alvin Plantinga and Kit Fine, but so far as I know it hasn't been used the way I use it—as an argument against direct reference.

(2) It's possible that Locke not exist.

(3) Therefore, the proposition *Locke does not exist* is possibly true.

(4) Necessarily, if *Locke does not exist* is true, then *Locke does not exist* exists.

(5) Necessarily, if *Locke does not exist* is true, then Locke does not exist.

(6) Therefore, necessarily, if *Locke does not exist* is true, then Locke does not exist and *Locke does not exist* does exist.

(7) Therefore, it is possible that *Locke does not exist* exist and Locke not exist.

(8) Propositions have their constituents essentially.

(9) Therefore, it's false that *Locke does not exist* has Locke as a constituent.

(10) Therefore, it's false that all singular propositions are K-propositions.

What should one think of this argument? Clearly it's valid; so if there is to be fault found with it, it must be with the truth of the premises.

(2) looks impeccable. Though he was a great philosopher (and perhaps deserves more credit than he gets), Locke clearly exists contingently. *Prima facie*, (3) might also look clearly to be true. One might think that to say that it is possible for Locke not to exist just *is* to say that the proposition *Locke does not exist* is possibly true. What else could one mean by asserting (2)? However, the move from a proposition like (2) to a proposition like (3) has been contested by many friends of K-propositions.[16] It is noted by these philosophers that a claim like

(11) It is necessary that p

can be understood in different ways. One interpretation of (11) is that it means something like

(12) p is true in all worlds.

Another rendering of (11), which usually is taken to be equivalent to (12), is

(13) It's not possible that ~p.

Similarly, a proposition like

(14) It is possible that p

can be understood in different ways. On one reading, it is equivalent to

(15) p is true in some possible world.

Another rendering of (14), which usually is taken to be equivalent to (15), is

(16) It's not necessary that ~p.

Now, some who object to the move from (2) to (3) will argue as follows. It doesn't follow from the fact that it is possible that Locke not exist that the proposition *Locke does not exist* is possibly true. It does follow that the proposition *Locke does not exist* is possible. But, this proposition can be possible without being possibly true; we can come up with a weaker sense of possibility that doesn't allow us to move from (2) to (3). We can see this by comparing two different readings of (14). It is not necessary for (14) to be true that (15) be true, they will say. All that is necessary for the truth of (14) is the truth of (16). It suffices for the possibility of *Locke does not exist* that it be false that *necessarily, it's false that Locke does not exist*. Does *Locke does not exist* meet this condition? That is, is it false that its complement is necessarily true? It does meet this condition. For, in a world W where Locke does not exist, neither will the proposition *it is false that Locke does not exist* (given that it is a K-proposition). Then, the proposition *it's false that Locke does not exist* will have no truth value in W; it does not exist in W. Therefore, the proposition *it's false that Locke does not exist* will not be necessarily true, since what it is for a proposition to be necessarily true is for it to be true in

all worlds. Since it's false that the complement of *Locke does not exist* (that is, *it's false that Locke does not exist*) is necessary, *Locke does not exist* is possible.

There is a problem with such a response to the move from (2) to (3). Consider the following proposition (here I mirror one of Plantinga's arguments):

(17) Locke is an empiricist and is not an empiricist.

Could (17) be true? Clearly it couldn't; it is a contradiction and necessarily false. However, it looks like the same reasons for thinking the proposition within the scope of the possibility operator (i.e., *Locke does not exist*) in (2) is possible can be given for thinking (17) is possible. It was claimed that this proposition in (2) is possible because its complement isn't necessarily true. Its complement isn't necessarily true because there are worlds in which it doesn't exist and hence has no truth value, and there are worlds in which it doesn't exist because it depends for its existence on a contingent object. (17) meets all of these conditions.[17] In other words, it suffices for (17) to be possible that it be false that

(18) It's false that Locke is and is not an empiricist

is necessary. For (18) to be necessary, though, it has to exist in all possible worlds. But we can see it doesn't, for (18) is a singular proposition, and it exists only if Locke does. So, (18) isn't necessary, and therefore (17) is possible.

Clearly this is absurd. Any understanding of possibility on which an explicit contradiction like (17) can be possible has to be mistaken. Therefore, I conclude that this objection to the move from (2) to (3) is flawed. Apart from this sort of objection, there seems to be no reason not to think that (3) it true. It's therefore reasonable to think that if there is a problem in this argument, it must be in one of the other premises.

What should we say about (4)? One reason for accepting it is that it might seem to follow from a more general proposition that one might think is true; namely, if an object has a property in some world, then it exists in that world. In other words, one may think that the following proposition is true (and that it entails [4]):

(19) Necessarily, for any object o, any property p, and any world W, if o has p in then o exists in W.

(19) is a statement of what has been called *property actualism* by Kit Fine, and *serious actualism* by Alvin Plantinga.[18] Although (19) may look clearly correct *prima facie*, many people have rejected it (for instance, doesn't an object have the property *nonexistence* in worlds in which it doesn't exist?). One reason to accept (19) is that it might seem to follow from actualism.[19] Consider the following argument:

(20) Necessarily, for any property p and world W, if p is exemplified in W, then there is (where the existential quantifier here is unrestricted to range over Meinongian/Lewisian possibilia) something in W that exemplifies p.

(21) Necessarily, whatever there is (unrestricted) in W, exists in W.

(22) Therefore, necessarily, whatever there is that exemplifies p in W, exists in W.

It seems to me that this short argument is sound. The argument is valid. Furthermore, (20) also seems to be true; if p is exemplified in a world, then there has to be (in as broad a sense as one likes) *something* in that world that exemplifies it. Since the only candidates there are for the things in that world that exemplify p are objects that exist in that world as (21), which follows from actualism, we arrive at the truth of serious actualism.

So, if we accept (19), can we conclude that (4) is true? Many direct reference

theorists claim that to move from (19) to (4) is to misunderstand how we should evaluate the truth of propositions with respect to various worlds. Even if a proposition p doesn't exist in a particular world W, from our perspective in the actual world, we may be able to evaluate the truth of p with respect to W. For instance, David Kaplan notes as being important

> the distinction between what *exists* at a given point and what can be "carried in" to be *evaluated* at that point, though it may *exist* only elsewhere. My "Circumstances of Evaluation" [similar to possible worlds] evaluate contents that may have no native existence at the circumstance but can be expressed elsewhere and carried in for evaluation.[20]

Joseph Almog makes a similar point in "Naming Without Necessity."[21] For Almog, what we do is "generate" the propositions at our world, and evaluate them with respect to all other worlds, whether these propositions exist there or not.

Perhaps the clearest statement of this sort of position is by Robert Adams.[22] Adams contends that there is an ambiguity in our statement of (4). To show this, Adams draws a distinction between a proposition being true *in* a world and a proposition being true *at* a world. Adams contends that if a proposition is true in a world, then it must exist in that world. That is to say, if a proposition p is true in a world W, then, necessarily, if W were actual, then p would exist. However, a proposition can be true *at* a world without existing *in* a world; it doesn't follow from the fact that a proposition p is true at a world W that, necessarily, if W were actual, then p would exist. Here is one of Adams's clearer statements of the notion.[23]

> A world-story [possible world] that includes no singular proposition about me constitutes and describes a possible world in which I

would not exist. It represents my possible non-existence, not by including the proposition that I do not exist but simply by omitting me. That I would not exist if all the propositions it includes, and no other actual propositions, were true is not a fact internal to the world that it describes, but an observation that we make from our vantage point in the actual world, about the relation of that world-story to an individual of the actual world.

Let me mark this difference in point of view by saying that the proposition that I never exist is (in the actual world) true *at* many possible worlds, but *in* none.

I take Adams to be making the same sort of point that Kaplan and Almog are making. We can (in Kaplan's terminology) "carry in" propositions that exist actually, and evaluate their truth with respect to other worlds "from our vantage point in the actual world." My main problem with this sort of response to the move from (19) to (4) is that, try as I might, I can't make sense of it. Nowhere in the literature is it clearly explained so far as I can tell. I can (somewhat) visualize the picture these people are working with, but frankly I can't see how it's anything more than that, a *picture*. I certainly understand why with regard to a world W where Locke does not exist it seems that the proposition *Locke does not exist* correctly describes the situation with regard to W better than, say, *Locke is a lion-tamer* does. However, if neither singular proposition exists in W, then why is this the case? To put the point a different way, it seems that there has to be some fact about W (possible worlds are *maximal*) that makes it the case that the former proposition does accurately describe the situation with regard to W better than the latter proposition does. What makes it the case that *Locke does not exist* is true at W, and *Locke is a lion-tamer* isn't? It would seem that there would have to be something

internal to the world in question that would explain this. It certainly is the case that "from our perspective," the former accurately describes the way W is; whereas, the latter does not. But isn't this because it is a fact about W that if W were actual the former would be true, and the latter false?

Quite frankly, it is difficult to say much about this distinction because of the degree of obscurity involved. However, it certainly isn't the responsibility of the foe of K-propositions to render the concept more lucid. Until someone does produce a clearer rendering of the truth-at/truth-in distinction (or variations thereof), I contend that it appears that claiming that (4) is false because of a failure to distinguish between these two concepts fails. Based on the explication of the distinction we have from proponents like Adams, Kaplan, and Almog, I contend that the fact that a proposition correctly describes a possible world "from our perspective" needs to be analyzed in terms of there being a proposition in the world (internal to the world) in question.

Apart from these two objections, (4) seems to be correct. The premises after (4) appear unobjectionable. (5) is clearly right. (6) follows from (4) and (5). (7) follows from (3) and (6), and (8) is a very plausible claim about the nature of propositions. (9) follows from (7) and (8), and (10) follows from (9), the concept of a K-proposition, and the fact that *Locke does not exist* is a singular proposition.

One response a direct reference theorist might be tempted to make when faced with this sort of argument is to claim that existence is a second-order predicate. The objection to this response that immediately springs to mind is that, for the direct reference theorist, singular terms (indexicals and proper names, at least) don't express properties or individual concepts. Hence, existence (in the context of singular sentences) *can't*

be a second-order predicate because there is nothing for it to be a predicate or property *of*. Therefore, if the direct reference theorist wants to claim that existence is a second-order predicate to circumvent the argument in section II, she will have to claim that singular terms express properties in sentences where existence is predicated of a subject. On the face of it, this maneuver might seem *ad hoc*. Why shouldn't singular terms in existential sentences function the same way they do in other types of sentences? However, the direct reference theorist might point out that existence is itself a peculiar sort of predicate, and one shouldn't be surprised if it affects the sentences in which it appears. It should be noted that if the friend of K-propositions accepts this response to the argument in section II, the property or individual concept expressed by these singular terms must be such that they allow for rigid designation (they will have to be essences). Otherwise, one encounters serious problems.[24] I have yet to encounter anyone who accepts this sort of view of singular terms. However, for anyone who would be tempted by such a view, they should justify this bifurcation in the ways that singular terms refer: Why not allow that *all* indexicals and proper names refer by way of some sort of essence?[25]

There is another potential objection to this argument. It seems that I am assuming that we can't actually have propositions that contain Locke as a constituent if Locke doesn't actually exist. But perhaps we can. How is this? Locke exists in other worlds, so why can't Locke in another world serve as a physical constituent of a proposition about Locke in this world?

The objector here has misunderstood what it is for objects to exist in worlds (for an actualist—we'll consider actualism momentarily). Locke exists in some

nonactual world W iff were W actual, Locke would exist. This is a standard actualist rendering of what it is for an object to exist in a world (it comes from Plantinga). Though propositions are abstract objects, the same sort of analysis of existing in a world should apply to them. Consider a world W' where Locke does not exist. Suppose that W' is actual. The proposition *Locke does not exist* is true in W'. But we've no Locke to be a constituent of this proposition. Why not "borrow" physical Locke from W? The answer is that though W exists in W' (it exists necessarily), W is an abstract entity, a maximal state of affairs or a maximal proposition of some sort. It doesn't "contain" physical objects except in the sense that were it actual, certain physical objects (e.g., Locke) would exist. There is no physical man Locke that exists when W' is actual to be a constituent of K-propositions about Locke, even though there are abstract objects (possible worlds) that exist when W' is actual that portray or represent Locke as existing. But these are nonactual (they don't obtain) and wholly abstract.

Consider the analogy with sets. In a world W where Locke does not exist, Locke can't be a member of a set (in W). There are other worlds that represent Locke as existing that exist in W (and no doubt Locke is a member of innumerable sets in these worlds). But these other worlds are abstract and we can't "borrow" a physical object from them so we can have sets with Locke as a member in W. In the actual world α there are sets only about objects that exist in α. No doubt many of the objects that are members of sets in the actual world are members of sets in other worlds. But this is just to say were any of these other worlds actual, these objects would be members of sets. In worlds where he doesn't exist, Locke isn't around to be a member of a set or a constituent of a proposition.

Here is another potential parallel counterargument to the main argument I've given above. Consider first Locke's singleton, a set that exists in a. Consider a world in which Locke doesn't exist. In such a world Locke is not a member of his singleton, for he doesn't exist. This means it is contingent whether Locke is a member of his singleton. But sets have their members essentially. Hence sets do not exist. If the main argument of this section is a good one, this argument also should be a good one. But its conclusion is absurd. Hence there is a flaw somewhere in the main argument.

This argument is flawed. In a world where Locke doesn't exist, neither does his singleton. So we can't deduce that Locke is contingently (not essentially) a member of his singleton simply by considering a world in which Locke does not exist. Note also that we have no reason for thinking that Locke's singleton exists in worlds where Locke does not exist. On the other hand, in worlds where Locke does not exist, we have (obviously) *prima facie* a strong reason to think that *Locke does not exist* exists and is true. As we've seen, this claim is controversial, but I suspect that all would concede that *prima facie* there certainly is reason to think that this proposition exists in worlds where Locke doesn't.

III

Most philosophers are actualists. That is, they accept something very close to the following claim

(23) Necessarily, whatever there is (where the existential quantifier is "unrestricted" to include Lewisian-type possible worlds, or Meinongian-type nonactual objects), exists.[26]

To assert (23) is not to follow Spinoza in claiming that the only possible world is the actual world. Rather, to assert (23) is to say that there aren't, nor could there have been, any objects that don't exist. Actualism is an extremely attractive position.[27] However, I won't argue for it here. Rather, I will argue in this section of the paper that if actualism is true (as well as certain plausible assumptions about the nature of possible worlds), then the K-thesis is false.

For the actualist, possible worlds (if she thinks there are such things) will be constructed of entities that exist actually. Typically, actualists think of possible worlds as maximal (sets of) intensional entities.[28] Consider Robert Adams's understanding of possible worlds, or "world-stories" as he calls them. He says,

> Let us say that a *world-story* is a maximal consistent set of propositions. That is, it is a set which has as its members one member of every pair of mutually contradictory propositions, and which is such that it is possible that all of its members be true together.[29]

Alvin Plantinga thinks of possible worlds in terms of maximal states of affairs. He says,

> a pair of states of affairs S and S' may be so related that it is not possible that both obtain, in which case S *precludes* S'; and if it is impossible that S obtain and S' *not* obtain, then S *includes* S'. . . . Still further, a state of affairs S may be such that for any state of affairs, S', S either includes or precludes S', in which case S is *maximal*. Now we may say that a possible world is just a maximal possible state of affairs.[30]

Adams's and Plantinga's views about the nature of possible worlds represent two of the most common views of the nature of possible worlds among actualists. For clarity's sake, let's adopt Adams's conception of possible worlds for use in the rest of this argument.[31,32]

We are now in a position to see an unwelcome consequence of the notion of K-propositions; it entails that it's impossible that there exist individuals who don't exist in the actual world. In other words, there is nothing that doesn't exist in α, the actual world, that could have existed. Consider some world W, which contains some individual I who doesn't exist in α.[33] In the maximal set of propositions that is W, there is at least one singular proposition about I. Call this proposition "p." It is clear p is essential to W. W is a set, and a set has all its members essentially.[34] So, if p didn't exist, neither would W. It also is clear that p doesn't exist in α since I doesn't exist in α, and I's existence (since I is a constituent of p) is essential to p. Therefore, we can see that W doesn't exist in α. It follows from this that it's not possible that there exist any individuals who don't exist in α. For, what is it to be possible that there exist individuals that don't exist in α? It is for there to be a possible world in which there exists an individual who doesn't exist in α. But there are no such worlds. Such worlds essentially include singular propositions that don't exist.[35]

One response that an actualist proponent of the K-thesis might be tempted to make goes as follows. The above sorts of considerations show that we need to be careful about the sorts of propositions we allow to function as constituents of our possible worlds. Otherwise, it does look like we wind up with unwelcome consequences. However, there is an easy way to fix this problem: Leave singular propositions like the proposition expressed by (1) out of our possible worlds. This way, we can maintain that our possible worlds exist necessarily.

This will not work. Consider a world W where Locke doesn't exist. In W, the proposition expressed by (1) won't exist. But

clearly, relative to W the proposition expressed by (1) could have existed. So, we will want to represent his fact in W. In other words, we will want the proposition *that it is possible that Locke is a philosopher exist* to be true in W. But, this is a singular proposition about a singular proposition, and for the direct reference theorist (who already was committed to K-propositions), it looks like the existence of this proposition will entail that the singular proposition that it is about exists. One way to avoid this is to jettison the direct reference thesis in this case, and claim that instead of having the meaning of "that Locke is a philosopher" in the second-order singular proposition be the proposition it refers to, claim the meaning of this sentence is an individual essence of the proposition *Locke is a philosopher*. This would seem to circumvent the problem, but at the cost of giving up the direct reference thesis. If one is willing to give up the direct reference thesis about singular terms in this case, why not in all cases?[36]

There is an even more direct way to show that the K-thesis entails that there could not be any individuals that don't exist in a. Suppose that there could be an individual I who doesn't exist in α, and the K-thesis is true. Then the proposition

(24) It is possible that I exist.

is true in α.[37] Given the truth of serious actualism (19), the truth of (24) in α entails that (24) exists in α. However, we know that (24) *doesn't* exist in α, since I doesn't exist in α, and (24) is a K-proposition. Therefore, if the K-thesis is true, there couldn't exist any individuals who don't exist in α.[38]

A response that the K-theorist might be tempted to give goes as follows. It's true that there are no singular propositions about I. But, there are propositions that "say" that it's possible that there be an in-

dividual distinct from those individuals that exist in α. These propositions won't be expressed with singular sentences, though. Rather, they will be expressed with sentences using an existential quantifier (e.g., it's possible that there be some individual x such that for any y that exists in α, x is distinct from y). The fact that we have these more general existential claims allows us to account for our intuitions that it's true that there could be an individual distinct from all actual individuals.

The first thing to note about this response is that if it works, it is a response only to the second argument to the conclusion that the K-thesis entails that it's not possible that there be any individuals distinct from those that actually exist. The question to ask, then, is whether this response neutralizes the force of the second argument. It does go some way in accounting for our intuitions that it is true (i.e., there is a true proposition) that there could have been an individual distinct from all actual individuals. However, the argument does not go far enough. There certainly are true "general existential" propositions of the sort expressed by the example sentence in the last paragraph with the existential quantifiers. But, it seems as though there also are true *singular* propositions about individuals that don't exist. No doubt that we may not be in a position to entertain many of these. But we certainly can entertain some of them. For example, suppose I fashion separately two halves of a table such that, if I were to stick the two halves together, a table would come into existence.[39] Suppose the two halves are sitting in front of me in my workshop. Now, it seems as though I can entertain singular propositions about the table that would exist, were I to put the two halves of the table together. The fact that I can entertain these propositions entails (trivially) that these propositions exist. No doubt I also can entertain general

propositions that would be expressed with sentences with existential quantifiers in them. But, it also seems that I can entertain singular propositions about the (nonexistent) table. Hence, I conclude that trying to account for intuitions that there are true propositions that "claim" that there could be an individual distinct from any individual that exists in α by claiming that these propositions are general existential propositions fails. It seems as though there also are singular propositions about (some, at least) such nonexistent individuals.

Clearly, the conclusion that it is not possible for there to be individuals who don't exist in α is a problem for the K-thesis. Since a direct reference theory of singular terms, together with some very plausible metaphysical assumptions, leads quite naturally to the K-thesis, I take the conclusion of the argument we've just seen to count against the direct reference theory.

I have attempted to show that there are difficulties with the notion of K-propositions. In particular, there are two strong arguments that can be raised against the K-thesis that start from the fact that K-propositions about contingent objects themselves exist contingently. First, some propositions cannot depend for their existence on the objects they are about, since these propositions would be true (and *ipso facto* exist) if the objects they were about didn't exist. Second, the K-thesis entails that it is impossible that there exist any individuals that don't exist in α. These arguments count strongly against the K-thesis. Since the direct reference theory, together with some very plausible views about the nature of propositions, leads very naturally to K-thesis, there is a cost, and perhaps more of a cost than others have noted, to accepting the direct reference thesis.[40]

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NOTES

1. By "singular proposition," I mean a proposition that is, in a significant sense, "directly about" a particular individual. Some have taken "singular proposition" to *mean* "a proposition with an individual as a constituent." But, it seems to me (and many others) that a proposition with a haecceity as a constituent also would count as a singular proposition. One might even be willing to claim that a proposition with any sort of individual essence as a constituent would count as a singular proposition. Then, it seems a minimum necessary condition for a proposition to be a singular proposition is that the subject constituent allow for rigid designation. In arguing against K-propositions, then, I don't mean to be arguing against singular propositions *per se*. Rather, my arguments are directed at a particular type of singular proposition. Of course, I'm perfectly willing to grant the proponent of K-propositions the term "singular proposition," but then we will want to coin a term that will cover all types of propositions that are "directly about" particular individuals.

2. See Scott Soames, "Direct Reference, Propositional Attitudes, and Semantic Content," in *Propositions and Attitudes,* ed. Nathan Salmon and Scott Soames (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988); Nathan Salmon, *Frege's Puzzle* (Atascadero: Ridgeview, 1991); John Perry, *The Problem of the Essential Indexical and Other Essays* (New York: Oxford, 1993), especially "Thought Without Representation"; Howard Wettstein, *Has Semantics Rested on a Mistake? and Other Essays* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991) (although in one of the chronologically latter essays in the book he indicates a desire to dispense with propositions altogether); and (esp. early in the essay) David Kaplan, "Demonstratives" in *Themes From Kaplan,* ed. Joseph Almog, John Perry, and Howard Wettstein (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), and "Dthat" reprinted in *Demonstratives,* ed. Palle Yourgrau (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990).

3. I should also note that some (for instance, see Nathan Salmon, *Reference and Essence* [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981], p. 22) think of a view on which the content of a rigid term is the haecceity of the individual it designates as a direct reference view. The arguments in this paper won't apply to this sort of view about content. So, if one wants to say that this sort of view of reference ought to be included among direct reference views, one should regard the arguments of this paper as applying only to a class of direct reference views.

4. *Themes from Kaplan,* p. 483.

5. *Journal of Philosophy,* vol. 83, (1986), p. 228. I should note that I take the Millian thesis of names to be distinct from a direct reference view of names. The former is a claim about how reference is secured; names are just "tags" that serve to denote their referent. Reference is not secured via any sort of description. The latter is a claim about the content a term contributes to the semantic content of expressions in which the term appears; rather than contributing a qualitative sense or property, the term contributes the individual designated. However, with the direct reference thesis (unlike the Millian thesis) a description *can* factor in securing reference.

6. This isn't to say that descriptions can't play a role in "fixing the reference" of a rigid term. Nor is this supposed to rule out indexical terms having a character. But, for those descriptions that do serve to fix the reference of a term (either in the way that a character does, as a description that is "constantly with" the term, or in the way that an initial reference-fixing description does), they aren't part of the semantic content of that term. Also, strictly speaking the direct reference doesn't entail the existence of propositions. One could think that the semantic contribution of, e.g., a name is its referent and not think that there are propositions, or in particular K-propositions. However, every direct reference theorist I know of thinks that K-propositions exist, and as I try to show above, there is ample motivation for the direct reference theorist to think that there are K-propositions.

7. Some (as Dennis Stampe did) may respond that the claim in the last sentence of the above paragraph isn't quite right. We shouldn't say that the content of a name is its referent. Rather, we should say that names have no content, only referents. So, we need to be careful about how we express compositionality; we should say that the content of a sentence is built up out of the meanings of its constituent parts *that have content.* Names don't, so this response would block the move from a direct reference theory of names to K-propositions. But, it seems to me that there is a problem with holding compositionality together with the claim that names have no content, only referents. Consider the sentences, "Locke is a philosopher" and "Hume is a philosopher." Clearly, they express different propositions. But, how can this view account for this fact? If the contents of sentences are determined (totally) by the contents of their component parts that have content (plus relevant relations that hold between the contents), and names have no content, these two sentences should express the same proposition. Therefore, I contend that a direct reference theorist who accepts compositionality should claim that names do have content.

8. There are, of course, good reasons for thinking this, the main one being the Davidsonian argument that it explains how we are able to learn an entire language from a finite stock of predicates and subject terms.

9. I should say that I'm neutral as to whether the grammatical form of (1) illustrates its true semantic form. For instance, one might say that though (1) is a subject-predicate sentence, there are more than two content-bearing entities in (1): In addition to "Locke" and "philosopher," "is" expresses a relational tie that holds between the contents of the former words. This relational tie helps to explain the "unity of the proposition" with which Russell, Strawson, Ramsey, Geach, and others were concerned. However one thinks of the semantic form of (1) (as long as one grants that compositionality holds, and "Locke" has semantic content), my claim will go through.

10. It may also be a relation, if the predicate is a relational predicate.

11. I should note that for those who don't accept the move from the claim that all singular propositions expressible in English are K-propositions to the claim that all singular propositions are K-propositions, we could run substantially the same arguments against the direct reference theory with the weaker claim. In the argument in section II, the singular proposition in question is expressed by an English sentence (so our conclusion would be something like, "There is at least one singular proposition expressible in English that is not a K-proposition."). With the arguments in III, no world exists that is such that if it were to obtain there would be singular propositions expressible in English about individuals who don't exist in a. So, (at best) the only individuals who don't exist but who could have existed are those such that they exist in worlds that have no singular propositions that are expressible in English about individuals who don't exist in a. However, I find the move from the claim that all singular propositions expressible in English are K-propositions to the claim that all singular propositions are K-propositions plausible.

12. This was, of course, Frege's response to Russell's acceptance of K-propositions. See "Selection from the Frege-Russell Correspondence," in *Propositions and Attitudes*. Also, one might think that this is an example of an understanding of "proposition" on which propositions *aren't* abstract entities. One could claim this; however, most proponents of K-propositions want to claim that K-propositions count as *abstracta*.

13. One might think that certain properties, like *being taller than Bill Clinton,* are other examples of *abstracta* that have physical objects as constituents. I don't believe that properties have physical objects as constituents, if indeed properties have constituents; I take properties to be wholly abstract entities. But suppose Bill Clinton was part of the property *being taller than Bill Clinton.* Then consider a world where Bill Clinton doesn't exist and I do. In this paper we're thinking of propositions as entities built up out of constituent parts, properties, relations, and perhaps physical objects. So it seems reasonable to say that *being taller than Bill Clinton* is a constituent of the proposition *I am taller than Bill Clinton.* Supposedly this is false in our imagined world, for Bill Clinton doesn't exist. Of course, it is also false that I am shorter than Bill Clinton. So we have a true proposition in this world, *It is false that I am taller than Bill Clinton.* But if one its constituents has Bill Clinton as a constituent, and properties have their constituents essentially (as seems reasonable) this proposition won't exist in the world we're considering, for Bill Clinton doesn't exist there. But then it seems impossible for *It is false that I am taller than Bill Clinton* to be true in this world; it doesn't exist in this world. (Serious actualism, a position we'll examine shortly, entails that this proposition doesn't have the property *being false.*) So it looks like we have here an argument to the conclusion that properties don't have physical objects as constituents.

14. I wish to head off the response that maybe a proposition just is a set. It's awfully difficult to see how a set can be believed, or can be true or false. A set may model in some ways a proposition, but *pace* Stalnaker (and Lewis, depending on how one reads him), a proposition can't be a set.

15. Versions of this argument have been described by Kit Fine, "Postscript," in *Worlds, Times, and Selves* by Arthur Prior and Kit Fine (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press: 1977), pp. 149–150; Christopher Menzel in "Singular Propositions and Modal Logic," *Philosophical Topics*, vol. 21, (1993), pp. 113–148; and Alvin Plantinga, among others. Fine says in "Plantinga on the Reduction of Possibilist Discourse" (in *Alvin Plantinga,* ed. James Tomberlin and Peter van Inwagen [Dordrecht: Reidel, 1985], p. 161) that his version of the argument derives from Arthur Prior. The most forceful statement of this sort of argument I know of is in Plantinga's "On Existentialism," *Philosophical Studies*, vol. 44 (1983), pp. 1–20. I have been significantly influenced by Plantinga's presentation of this argument.

16. For instance, see Robert Adams, "Actualism and Thisness," *Synthese,* vol. 49 (1981), pp. 3–41; and Kit Fine, "Postscript," in *Worlds, Times, and Selves.*

17. See "On Existentialism," pp. 18–19.

18. See Kit Fine, "Plantinga on the Reduction of Possibilist Discourse," p. 163; and "Replies," p. 316 in *Alvin Plantinga.*

19. This is similar to an argument given by Plantinga in "Replies," pp. 318–319. See also "Two Concepts of Modality," p. 197 in *Philosophical Perspectives, Vol. 1: Metaphysics,* ed. James Tomberlin (Ridgeview: Atascadero, 1987).

20. "Afterthoughts," in *Themes from Kaplan,* p. 613.

21. Almog, pp. 238–239.

22. This isn't meant to imply that Adams accepts a direct reference theory. See *Actualism and Thisness,* pp. 18–32.

23. Adams, p. 22. Christopher Menzel also defends a truth in/truth at distinction in "Singular Propositions and Modal Logic."

24. As Keith Donnellan points out in "Speaking of Nothing," reprinted in *Naming, Necessity, and Natural Kinds,* ed. Stephen Schwartz (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977), p. 235.

25. I should note briefly that I think there is a temporal analogue to the argument in this section. Call the view on which there are no past or future individuals *presentism.* Call the position that objects have properties at a time only if they exist at that time *serious presentism.* There will be an argument from presentism to serious presentism analogous to the argument from actualism to serious actualism. Then, suppose that Locke doesn't exist right now. So the proposition *Locke does not exist* is true right now. However, if the K-thesis is true, this proposition is a K-proposition and hence doesn't exist right now. But, if this proposition is true right now, serious presentism says it must exist. Therefore *Locke does not exist* is not a K-proposition. Therefore the K-thesis is false. The friend of K-propositions will make moves analogous to the moves she makes in the argument in section II, and the responses to them will be analogous to responses made in section II. This argument against the K-thesis is weaker than the argument in section II due to the fact that presentism isn't as clearly true as actualism is (although it seems to me that presentism *is* true).

26. See, for instance, Alvin Plantinga, "Two Concepts of Modality," and "Replies" p. 314. One might also formulate actualism along the lines suggested by Robert Stalnaker in "Counterparts and Identity" (*Midwest Studies in Philosophy, Vol XI: Studies in Essentialism,* ed. Peter A. French, Theodore E. Uehling, Jr., and Howard K. Wettstein [Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986], p. 121). Stalnaker takes actualism to be the denial of possibilism, which according to Stalnaker is the thesis that things "may exist without actually existing." So, I take Stalnaker's formulation of actualism to be something like, "Necessarily, whatever exists, actually exists," where the first "exists" is an "unrestricted" sort of quantification, and the second "exists," is restricted in virtue of its being modified by the nonrigid term "actually." I prefer the formulation of (23); it seems to more clearly capture the essence of the actualist thesis. Compare Christopher Menzel's formulation early on in "Actualism, Ontological Commitment, and Possible World Semantics," *Synthese,* vol. 85 (1990), pp. 355–389.

27. See chapters 7 and 8 of Alvin Plantinga, *The Nature of Necessity.*

28. That is to say, either they are maximal sets of intensional entities, or they are maximal intensional entities (something like large conjunctions).

29. "Theories of Actuality," p. 204, reprinted in *The Possible and the Actual*, ed. Michael Loux (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1979).

30. "Transworld Identity or Worldbound Individuals?" reprinted in Loux, p. 147.

31. Note that we could use Plantinga's conception, or any conception on which there are singular intensional entities. For, the same sorts of arguments that led the direct reference theorist about proper names and demonstratives to adopt K-propositions could be given to lead the direct reference theorist to adopt a view on which physical objects are constituents of other singular intensional entities. For instance, consider the phrase "Locke's being a philosopher." This phrase expresses the state of affairs *Locke's being a philosopher*. The semantic contribution of the term "'Locke" to the sentence "Locke is a philosopher" is, for the direct reference theorist, the man Locke. If we assume, as we did with propositions, that states of affairs are in some sense structurally isomorphic to the phrases that express them, and they are built up out of the content of the parts of the phrases that express them, Locke himself will be a constituent of the state of affairs *Locke's being a philosopher*. Indeed, I know of no one who adopts K-propositions who doesn't adopt their analogue with respect to other singular intensional entities.

32. I think that these two actualist conceptions of possible worlds are most plausible. However, there are other ways for an actualist to think about possible worlds. One way would be to take them as primitive properties (or some sort of primitive, unstructured abstract entity), as Stalnaker suggests in "Possible Worlds" in Loux. Briefly, the problem I see with this is that possible worlds are supposed to represent what goes on in the (for lack of a better term) "concrete" world (where the "concrete" world includes *abstracta*). But, how is a primitive property going to have the requisite representational capacity? (Of course, Stalnaker has other reasons for taking possible worlds to be primitive properties: He wants to reduce propositions to sets of possible worlds.) Secondly, one could take a possible world to be a set of actually existing entities—"metaphysical atoms," as it were. For instance, these "atoms" might be occupied space-time points (as Quine suggests). (Very) Briefly, the problem with this proposal is that it seems hard-pressed to account for the intuition that there might have been more "atoms" than there are. See William Lycan, "The Trouble With Possible Worlds;" and M. J. Cresswell, "The World is Everything That is the Case," both in Loux.

33. Again: Necessarily, an individual I exists in a world W iff if W were actual, then I would exist (read the conditional here as strict implication).

34. Note again that if we used a view on which possible worlds are maximal conjunctions of intensional objects, we could run the same argument. For, the individual conjuncts (in this case, at least; there may be counterexamples to this on a coarse-grained view of intensional entities) of the conjunction that is the possible world are each necessary for the existence of the conjunction.

35. It might be thought that there is a quick answer to this argument; one can give up S5. S4 would be the correct modal system for such a view; the accessibility relations clearly will be transitive and reflexive, but not symmetrical. However, this maneuver will not solve the problem. Suppose we do give up S5. Then, we will say that a proposition p is possible, relative to α, iff there is a possible world accessible from α where p is true. However, there are no possible worlds accessible from α where it is true that there exists an individual who doesn't exist in α. It's not possible relative to this world that there exist any individuals who don't actually exist.

36. One reason that many people hold to a direct reference theory of singular terms is that they believe that it is necessary for rigid designation. But this is false; one can hold that singular terms (names and demonstratives) express properties and that they rigidly designate, if one holds that

the properties that are expressed by these terms are essences. See, for instance, Alvin Plantinga in his "Self-Profile" in *Alvin Plantinga,* pp. 76–88.

37. No doubt some will want to invoke here the (or a version of the) truth in/at distinction and say that (24) isn't true *in* a, although it is true *at* a. However, as we've already seen, it's not at all clear what someone who utters these words means by them.

38. I should note that the (actualist) non-direct reference theorist has a way to represent its being possible that some individual I who doesn't exist in the actual world exist. How so? The non-direct reference theorist can use properties to go "proxy" for the nonexistent individual. To allow for rigid designation, the property expressed by the name "I" should be some sort of essence. The sort of essence involved will depend on one's metaphysical inclinations. If one finds the notion of haecceities of nonexistent individuals problematic, then one can use world-indexed properties as an essence. If one doesn't have any problems with haecceites of individuals who don't exist (as I don't; although it seems as though we might have problems *grasping* such a property, I don't see why such properties shouldn't *exist*), one can allow either haecceities or world-indexed properties to serve as the property expressed by the name "I." If one does think that haecceities can't exist unexemplified, then propositions incorporating haecceities shouldn't be allowed to help constitute possible worlds. One can allow these propositions to be *represented* by something (e.g., a proposition, state of affairs) that helps to constitute a possible world. But (as we've seen here), if one allows contingently existing propositions to help constitute one's possible worlds, these possible worlds themselves wind up existing contingently.

39. There are deep issues in the metaphysics of material objects lurking here. For instance, maybe there are no tables, or maybe putting the two halves of the table together doesn't bring into existence a new object. I follow common-sense intuitions that we can bring an object (a table, at least) into existence by fashioning separately two halves of a table and sticking the two halves together.