

# Being someone else

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I have sometimes wondered why I am who I am. Why, out of all the people in the world, am I *this* one? Is there not something arbitrary in the fact that I turned out to be Martin Glazier rather than someone else? Couldn't things have been otherwise?

Many have been tempted to answer 'yes'. Thus David Lewis writes:

Here am I, there goes poor Fred; there but for the grace of God go I; how lucky I am to be me, not him. Where there is luck there must be contingency. I am contemplating the possibility of my being poor Fred, and rejoicing that it is unrealized.<sup>1</sup>

Lewis was not alone. Thomas Nagel writes:

My being TN (or whoever in fact I am) seems accidental. . . . So far as what I am essentially is concerned, it seems as if I just *happen* to be the publicly identifiable person TN—as if what I really am, this conscious subject, might just as well view the world from the perspective of a different person. . . . From a purely objective point of view my connection with TN seems arbitrary.<sup>2</sup>

And in a similar vein, Bernard Williams writes:

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<sup>1</sup>Lewis (1986, 231).

<sup>2</sup>Nagel (1986, 60–61). This passage and the one below are quoted in Ninan (2009, 447).

'I might have been somebody else' is a very primitive and very real thought; and it tends to carry with it an idea that one knows what it would be like for this 'I' to look out on a different world, from a different body, and still be the same 'I'.<sup>3</sup>

These philosophers have been attracted to the 'contingentist' thought that it is possible that I should be someone else.

Contingentism is also presupposed by those philosophers who take it to be possible that I should *become* someone else. L. A. Paul, for instance, has argued that some of life's biggest choices, such as the choice to become a parent or to pursue a certain career, can be 'transformative'. A choice that is transformative in Paul's sense

involves the possibility of undergoing an experience that changes you from the self you are now into a different, new self. . . . When confronted with a transformative choice, you must decide whether to replace your current self and its perspective with a new self and that self's perspective.<sup>4</sup>

Although Paul here glosses transformative choice in terms of the notion of the self, it is not altogether clear from this passage how she wishes to understand that notion. But what *is* clear is that she thinks there can be distinct things *s* and *s'* such that although I am *s*, I will later be *s'*. In this sense, she thinks it is possible that I should become someone else. But it can hardly be the case that I *will* be *s'* unless it is *possible* that I should be *s'*. And so Paul must take it to be possible that I should be someone else. Indeed, anyone who understands transformative choice to involve becoming someone else is in this way committed to contingentism.<sup>5</sup>

Despite these philosophers' attraction to contingentism, however, the view may seem absurd. For how could I be someone other than who I am?

The aim of this paper is to show that contingentism is, if not true, then at least not absurd. I will argue that the tenability of contingentism may be upheld—in fact, can only be upheld—by appeal to a notion

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<sup>3</sup>Williams (1973, 40).

<sup>4</sup>Paul (2015, 490).

<sup>5</sup>Of course, there may be other ways of understanding transformative choice that are not so committed.

of perspective that is distinctively metaphysical, in contrast to the more usual epistemic notion. It is in terms of this notion of perspective that the contingentist may distinguish two senses of metaphysical possibility, one in which I must be MG and one in which I might be someone else.

Although I have spoken about myself and have asked about the possibility that *I* should be someone else, in Cartesian style my considerations are intended to apply to you as well. As you read this paper, you should translate the arguments I give about myself into arguments about yourself.

## 1 The challenge to contingentism

I begin by clarifying the contingentist view and the challenge it faces. The contingentist claims that it is possible that I should be someone else—poor Fred, say. But how could I be someone other than who I am?

The contingentist's claim must not be misunderstood. Although she does think it possible that I should be someone other than who I am, she of course does not think it possible that I should both be Fred and also not be Fred. Her position is rather that although I am not Fred, it is nonetheless *possible* that I should be Fred.

There is a more subtle way in which the contingentist's claim might be misunderstood. It should not be taken to be a *de re* claim of possible identity—a claim of the form ' $\diamond(a = b)$ '. We should not understand the contingentist, that is, as saying of Fred and me that it is possible that we should be identical. For Fred and I are distinct objects and objects that are distinct are necessarily so.

Let us call a statement of the form ' $a = b$ ' an *identification*. The contingentist must recognize a nonidentificational reading of statements of the form 'I am Fred'.<sup>6</sup> It is on this reading that she takes it to be possible that I am Fred. Indeed, I believe it is such a possibility that Nagel has in mind in considering whether he 'might just as well view the world from the perspective of a different person' and that Williams has in mind in discussing 'what it would be like for this "I" to look out on a different world, from a different body'. And Caspar Hare, a recent proponent of contin-

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<sup>6</sup>Cf. Nagel (1986, 55): 'From this point of view it can appear that "I am TN", insofar as it is true, is not an identity but a subject-predicate proposition.'

gentism, also appears to understand the view in this way. He glosses the possibility that I should be Ralph Nader as the possibility that I should 'see the world through Ralph Nader's eyes'.<sup>7</sup> I will have to leave for another time the question of how precisely this nonidentificational reading is to be understood. But these philosophers' remarks give enough indication of its meaning for our purposes.

This distinction between the identificational and nonidentificational readings of 'I am Fred' might be thought to provide an adequate response to the challenge to contingentism. For the contingentist may agree that objects that are distinct are necessarily so and yet insist that it is nonetheless possible that I am Fred when 'I am Fred' is given its nonidentificational reading. Of course, no reasonable response to the challenge will judge it to be wholly misplaced. There is surely something absurd in the vicinity of contingentism even if it is not the view itself. But the contingentist can acknowledge this. For she may concede that it is not possible that I am Fred when 'I am Fred' is given its *identificational* reading.

In fact, however, this response is not adequate. For even on the non-identificational reading there is a point of view from which it does not seem possible that I am Fred. To see this, notice first that the statement 'I am MG' is true on this reading. After all, if we are willing to state the possibility that I am Fred by saying that I might just as well view the world from the perspective of Fred, or through Fred's eyes, then since I *do* view the world from the perspective of MG, and through MG's eyes, we should admit that I am MG.

What is more, not only am I now MG, I have been MG my whole life. And this is no accident. It is no accident that every morning I wake up and once again find that I view the world from MG's perspective. How could it be otherwise? That is just who I am! From this point of view, then, it seems necessary that, on the nonidentificational reading, I am MG, and therefore not possible that, on this reading, I am Fred. The challenge to contingentism remains.

Since the contingentist must state her position using only the non-identificational reading, and since the challenge to contingentism is in turn stated using only that reading, let us restrict ourselves from now on to the nonidentificational reading of statements of the form 'I am Fred'

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<sup>7</sup>Hare (2009, 82).

unless we explicitly say otherwise. The contingentist's position is then that there is someone else *s*—someone *s* such that it is not the case that I am *s*—such that it is possible that I am *s*. The challenge is that there is a point of view from which this does *not* seem possible.

It might be suggested that the contingentist should retreat from the letter of her position. Perhaps she should simply reject the possibility that I am someone else, even on the nonidentificational reading. What is really possible, she might say, is not that I am Fred but that I am in just the situation or predicament Fred is (actually) in. This 'surrogate' possibility claim, it might be argued, avoids the challenge while preserving the spirit of the contingentist view.

If this surrogate response is to have any hope of success, the surrogate possibility claim must be properly understood. It cannot be taken to be the claim that it is possible that what is true of me should be just what is actually true of Fred, or, to put it another way, that it is possible that I should satisfy just those open sentences that are actually satisfied by Fred. For it is actually true of Fred that he is Fred and that he is not MG. But according to the surrogate response it is not possible that I should be Fred or that I should fail to be MG.

The surrogate possibility claim must therefore be understood in some weaker fashion. A natural thought is to understand it as the claim that it is possible that I should satisfy just those *qualitative* open sentences that are actually satisfied by Fred. But I do not think this version of the surrogate response preserves the spirit of the contingentist view. Although in the case of Fred this fact may be hard to see, in other cases it is manifest. Suppose for instance that I inhabit a universe with twofold (180°) rotational symmetry. Here I stand, one meter from the axis of symmetry, staring down my doppelgänger.<sup>8</sup> The contingentist will think: I could have been him! According to the surrogate response, what is really possible is not that I should *be* my doppelgänger, but that I should satisfy all and only the qualitative open sentences he satisfies. But since the universe is symmetric we may plausibly suppose that I *already* satisfy these sentences. Yet it is part of the contingentist's thought that something further is possible, something which is not actual: that I am my doppel-

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<sup>8</sup>Alternatively, we might suppose I inhabit a world of two-way eternal recurrence, in which history repeats itself endlessly with no first epoch and no last epoch.

gänger. The surrogate response does not do justice to the contingentist's sense of unactualized possibility.

In this case, then, the contingentist admits that not only is it possible that I should be in just the predicament my doppelgänger is in, it is also possible that I should *be* him. She should do the same in the case of Fred. She should insist that not only is it possible that I should be in just the predicament Fred is in, it is possible that I should *be* Fred. She should therefore reject this version of the surrogate response.

Have we considered too weak an understanding of the surrogate possibility claim? It might be thought that the lesson of the symmetric universe case is simply that the merely qualitative is not enough: the contingentist must require that I satisfy more than just the qualitative open sentences Fred satisfies. Of course, we have seen that she cannot require that I satisfy *all* the open sentences Fred satisfies. But might there be some intermediate requirement that will serve?

It has been suggested to me that the contingentist should understand the surrogate possibility claim as the claim that it is possible that I should satisfy just those open sentences that Fred (actually) satisfies, provided that they do not involve either of us. But this version of the surrogate response does not seem to me to be adequate either. To see why, suppose there is nothing in the symmetric universe other than my doppelgänger and me. (Not even points of space, if we are suitably relationalist.) As I confront my doppelgänger in that inky void, the contingentist will think: I could have been him! But he and I are the only occupants of the universe and so we may plausibly suppose I already satisfy all and only the open sentences not involving either of us that he satisfies. Yet the contingentist will take something further to be possible: that I am my doppelgänger. I therefore think that this version of the surrogate response also fails to preserve the spirit of the contingentist view.

Is there some more subtle version of the response that succeeds? It is hard to be definitive here, but a case can be made that any version will face the following dilemma. Either the proposed understanding of the surrogate possibility claim is such that if I satisfy the condition specified in the claim then I am not MG, or it is not. If the former, it is inadequate: the surrogate response, after all, is supposed to avoid the conclusion that it is possible that I should fail to be MG. And if the latter, then I believe it

will be possible to construct a case in which my doppelgänger and I both satisfy the condition. Upon considering this case, I believe, it will be clear that the contingentist will think that something further is possible: that I am my doppelgänger. And so the response will be seen to be inadequate.

A different response to the challenge involves distinguishing senses of 'I'. It will be suggested that the contingentist should take it to be possible in one sense of 'I' that I should be Fred, but take this to be impossible in another sense of 'I'. What might these senses of 'I' be? Philosophers have offered a number of suggestions. For instance, Descartes distinguished the body from the soul. Kant distinguished 'phenomenal' and 'noumenal' selves. And the early Wittgenstein distinguished the human being from the 'metaphysical subject'.

Further suggestions continue to emerge in the contemporary period. For example, one might distinguish the 'center' of a Johnstonian 'arena of presence and action' from the human being who occupies that center.<sup>9</sup> One might distinguish the Nagelian 'objective self' from the 'particular person' through whom this objective self views the world.<sup>10</sup> Or one might distinguish between Finean 'metaphysical' and 'empirical' selves.<sup>11</sup>

Although there is some difficulty in understanding these potential senses of 'I', they are not without interest. But they do not deliver a successful response to the challenge to contingentism, since it will rearise even if these senses can be distinguished. To see this, take whatever sense of 'I' is supposed to vindicate the possibility that I should be Fred; to fix ideas, let it be my Cartesian soul *s*. Of course, mine is not the only soul in the world; there are others as well. The contingentist will surely wonder: why, out of all the souls in the world, am I *this* one?<sup>12</sup> And if *s'* is a soul other than mine, the contingentist will surely find compelling the following Lewisian thought:

Here am I, there goes poor *s'*; there but for the grace of God  
go I . . . I am contemplating the possibility of my being poor  
*s'*, and rejoicing that it is unrealized.

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<sup>9</sup>Johnston (2010, ch. 2).

<sup>10</sup>Nagel (1986, ch. 4).

<sup>11</sup>Fine (2005).

<sup>12</sup>Here and elsewhere in this paper, we take the contingentist to be capable of thinking about me in the first person. Perhaps the figure of the contingentist is therefore best understood as 'me with my contingentist hat on' or 'me in my contingentist moods'.

The contingentist, then, will take it to be possible that I should be  $s'$ . Yet I may at the same time reflect that

I am  $s$  and have been my whole life. Indeed, it is no accident that every morning I wake up and once again find that I am  $s$ . How could it be otherwise?

There is still a point of view, then, from which it seems necessary that I should be  $s$  and thus not possible that I should be  $s'$ . The problem has not been resolved, only relocated.<sup>13</sup>

The contingentist might think to deny that it is possible that I should be  $s'$ , thus leaving her free to concede the necessity of my being  $s$ . But she takes it to be possible that I should be Fred. How can she accept this possibility while denying the possibility that I should be  $s'$ ?

She might try to drive a wedge between the two in the following way. We have supposed that the contingentist's response to the original challenge involves taking it to be possible that I should be Fred when 'I' refers to my soul  $s$ . And so she might insist that it is not possible that  $s$  should be  $s'$  and thus not possible that, in this sense of 'I', I should be  $s'$ .

But whether or not this is correct, it does nothing to show that there is not some sense of 'I' in which it is possible that I should be  $s'$ . And the contingentist faces considerable pressure to say that there *is* such a sense. After all, she finds it compelling that I might contemplate the possibility of my being Fred and rejoice that it is unrealized. Why is it any less compelling that I might contemplate the possibility of my being  $s'$  and rejoice that *it* is unrealized? Or again, the contingentist finds it compelling that I might just as well view the world from a perspective other than that of MG. Why is it any less compelling that I might view the world from a perspective other than that of  $s$ ?

But if the contingentist admits that, in some sense of 'I', it is possible that I should be  $s'$ , then she will face the challenge. For as before there will be a point of view from which it seems that, in this same sense of 'I', it is necessary that I should be  $s$  and thus not possible that I should be  $s'$ .

A related response to the challenge involves distinguishing senses, not of 'I', but of 'Fred'. One might think the contingentist should distinguish Fred's body, Fred's soul, Fred's phenomenal self, Fred's noumenal self,

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<sup>13</sup>Cf. Lewis (1986, 232).

and so on. She might then take it to be possible, in one sense of ‘Fred’, that I should be Fred, while conceding that in another sense of ‘Fred’ this is not possible. But the challenge will rearise here in much the same way as before. To see this, take whatever sense of ‘Fred’ is supposed to vindicate its *not* being possible that I should be Fred; to fix ideas, let it be Fred’s soul  $s'$ . Just as before, it will be hard for the contingentist to deny that, from a certain point of view, it *is* possible that I should be  $s'$ . The challenge is not easily dismissed!

## 2 The notion of perspective

The challenge *can* be met, however, by means of a distinction between two senses of metaphysical possibility. The contingentist may take it to be possible that I should be Fred in one sense of possibility, but concede that in another sense this is not possible. But what is this distinction, and how can this contingentist response be defended?

It might be thought that these questions are readily disposed of by appeal to the framework of centered worlds. A centered world is an ordered pair comprising a possible world and an object said to be its ‘center’. The contingentist might think to proceed in the following way. She may first introduce a notion of *truth at a centered world* in such a way that ‘I am Fred’ will be true at a centered world  $(w, s)$  just in case at  $w$ ,  $s$  is Fred.<sup>14</sup> She may then define two senses of possibility. For something to be possible in the first sense is for it to be true at some world centered on me. For something to be possible in the second sense, by contrast, is for it to be true at some centered world or other, no matter whom it is centered on.

The contingentist may then offer the following response to the challenge. She may concede that there is no world centered on me at which ‘I am Fred’ is true and thus that it is not possible in the first sense that I should be Fred. But she may insist that there *is* a world centered on Fred at which ‘I am Fred’ is true and thus that it *is* possible in the second sense that I should be Fred.

In some ways this is not so far from the response we will ultimately recommend. But as it stands it is inadequate. After all, why couldn’t

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<sup>14</sup>Cf. Ninan (2009, n. 24).

someone admit the contingentist's domain of centered worlds (for they are nothing but pairs of possible worlds and objects) as well as her notion of truth at a centered world (for one may introduce whatever technical notions one likes) but simply deny that her two definitions correspond to any real forms of possibility? It is not clear why such a position is ruled out. But unless this can be made clear this response cannot be judged a success.

I believe the desired modal distinction should instead be understood in terms of the notion of a *perspective*.<sup>15</sup> Each of us has a perspective. For example, from my perspective the town of Saxapahaw, North Carolina is nearby, while from the perspective of Edward Snowden, confined as he is to Moscow, it is far away.

The sense of perspective I have in mind is metaphysical rather than epistemic. Of course, there is an epistemic sense of perspective. For example, we may say that from Plato's perspective the soul is tripartite, meaning by this only that Plato takes the soul to be tripartite. But there is also a metaphysical sense of perspective. Even if Snowden has never heard of Saxapahaw and thus does not take it to be any way at all, there is still a sense in which from his perspective it is far away. Saxapahaw's remoteness, that is, is part of the way the world is from his perspective *regardless* of how he takes the world to be.

It is natural to understand a perspective in this sense to itself have both a perspectival as well as a nonperspectival aspect. Thus not only is it part of how the world is from my perspective that Saxapahaw is nearby, it is also part of how the world is from my perspective that the earth is round and that  $2 + 2 = 4$ . To be sure, there is also a more restricted notion of perspective which is without any nonperspectival aspect. On this restricted notion, it will be the case from my perspective that Saxapahaw is nearby but not that the earth is round or that  $2 + 2 = 4$ . But my concern here will be with the unrestricted notion.

It will be helpful to allow ourselves a conception of propositions on which they may be perspectival or nonperspectival.<sup>16</sup> The proposition

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<sup>15</sup>Related notions are found in Fine (2005), Hare (2009) and Merlo (2016).

<sup>16</sup>Such a conception is less controversial than it may appear. For one who usually works with a conception of propositions on which they are all nonperspectival may nonetheless be able to recognize a new conception that allows some to be perspectival. One might, for instance, adopt a new conception on which a proposition is taken to

that Saxapahaw is nearby, for instance, will be perspectival, while the proposition that the earth is round will not be. Given such a conception we may describe a perspective by specifying which propositions hold from it. Perspectival propositions will serve to describe the perspectival aspect of a given perspective, while nonperspectival propositions will serve to describe its nonperspectival aspect.

Might one take a perspective to have *only* a nonperspectival aspect, or to be properly described by means of only nonperspectival propositions? On this view it will not be true that from Snowden's perspective Saxapahaw is far away. Instead it will be true only that from Snowden's perspective Saxapahaw is far away *from Snowden*. But this strange view cannot accommodate the fact of perspectival difference. Consider Jones, who is visiting North Carolina but has not heard of Saxapahaw. Despite their mutual ignorance of Saxapahaw, Jones and Snowden differ in their metaphysical perspectives on it. But surely no two metaphysical perspectives differ in their nonperspectival aspects. For example, it is equally the case from both perspectives that Saxapahaw is far away from Snowden and is nearby Jones. This view, then, cannot account for perspectival difference and so we should not adopt it. We should continue to take a perspective to have both a perspectival and a nonperspectival aspect.

If this metaphysical notion of perspective is admitted, it is very plausible to take it to have, as part of its perspectival aspect, a distinctively first-personal aspect. In the *Tractatus*, Wittgenstein imagined a complete description of one's perspective in the form of a book titled *The World as I Found It*.<sup>17</sup> If I were to write such a book, then among its claims would be statements in the first person. For instance, I will write the sentence 'I am in North Carolina.' Nor is my perspective confined to propositions about the locations of things. For I will also write the sentence 'I am MG.' And if, for instance, I am in pain, then I will write, 'I am in pain.' The world, it seems, is somehow given to me in a first-personal way.

Of course, I am not special in this regard. Let us suppose that Snowden writes his own version of *The World as I Found It*. Then somewhere

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be a complex consisting of a proposition in the usual sense together with a mode of presentation. If one thinks there are perspectival modes of presentation, one will arrive at a conception of propositions on which some propositions are perspectival.

<sup>17</sup>Wittgenstein (1922, 5.631). Of course, he would not agree with my claims about the book's contents!

within its pages we will find the sentences ‘I am in Moscow’ and ‘I am ES.’ And if Snowden is in pain, then we will find the sentence ‘I am in pain.’ Snowden’s perspective, no less than my own, has a first-personal aspect.

To be sure, we can recognize notions of perspective that are in no way first-personal. For instance, there is a sense in which it can be said that from the perspective of an eastbound ship in the Mediterranean, Africa is to starboard. This purely spatial notion of perspective is without any first-personal aspect. But our concern is with the notion of the perspective of a subject, which *is* plausibly taken to have a first-personal aspect.

If such a notion of perspective is admitted, we face the question of how its first-personal aspect should be described. We might think to describe the perspective of Edward Snowden by saying that from his perspective, Snowden is in Moscow. But although this statement is true, it is not sufficient to describe the first-personal aspect of Snowden’s perspective. For it is also the case from *my* perspective that Snowden is in Moscow and so this description fails to capture the first-personal difference between us. In the same way, it is not sufficient to say that from Snowden’s perspective he (or he himself) is in Moscow.

Instead, a proper description of the first-personal aspect of Snowden’s perspective must itself be first-personal. Indeed, the notion of perspective seems to be an ‘immersive’ one: to describe a perspective we must inhabit it, so to speak, and state how the world is from the resulting standpoint.<sup>18</sup> We should therefore describe the first-personal aspect of Snowden’s perspective by means of a proposition that is not merely perspectival but first-personal: from Snowden’s perspective, I am in Moscow.

This description cannot be regarded as a piece of ordinary language. After all, the utterance ‘from Snowden’s perspective, I am in Moscow’ would ordinarily be taken to describe Snowden’s perspective on *my* location, whereas the intent is to describe Snowden’s perspective on his own location. I do not wish to deny that there is an ordinary-language sense of perspective in which to say that from Snowden’s perspective I am in Moscow is to say something about me. But this notion of perspective appears to be non-immersive and indeed to lack any first-personal aspect. After all, how in the ordinary sense of perspective are we to cap-

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<sup>18</sup>Paul’s (2016) notion of the ‘agential perspective’ is immersive in this sense.

ture the perspectival difference between Snowden and me? It is again no help to point out that from Snowden's perspective he (or he himself) is in Moscow and it is not clear how else the difference might be captured. The ordinary notion of perspective, then, is not our notion of perspective and so we may set it aside.

Since our description of Snowden is not given in ordinary language, we need not worry that it fails to conform to the standard view of the behavior of 'I' in ordinary language. Standardly, a token of 'I' is held to refer to the agent of the context in which it is tokened.<sup>19</sup> But this standard view does not extend to our description of Snowden, and it is easy to see why. Since our notion of perspective is immersive, a description of a given perspective will be given from the standpoint of the perspective itself rather than the standpoint of the describer of the perspective. And so we should not in general expect a token of 'I' in such a description to refer to the describer, despite the describer's being the agent of the relevant context.

This nonstandard behavior creates a risk of confusion which it is wise to guard against. In saying that from Snowden's perspective I am in Moscow, we must remember that the intent is to describe Snowden's perspective on his own location rather than on mine. To remind ourselves we may choose to write 'I\*' instead of 'I' when we are within the scope of a 'perspectival operator'. For example, we may say that from Snowden's perspective I\* am in Moscow while from my perspective I\* am in North Carolina. But we should bear in mind that this is only a notational convenience and that the meaning of the two terms is the same.

Even if one takes a proper description of Snowden's perspective to require a first-personal proposition, one might object that there is some ambiguity in our specification of this proposition. We have described Snowden's perspective by saying that from his perspective, I (equivalently: I\*) am in Moscow. But one might agree with Frege that 'everyone is presented to himself in a special and primitive way in which he is presented to no one else'.<sup>20</sup> And one might think on this basis that a proper description of Snowden's perspective should specify the 'special and primitive' sense of 'I' in which Snowden is presented to himself. Thus

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<sup>19</sup>As in Kaplan (1977).

<sup>20</sup>Frege (1956, 298).

rather than (or in addition to) saying that from Snowden's perspective I am in Moscow, we should say that from Snowden's perspective  $I_{ES}$  am in Moscow, where 'I<sub>ES</sub>' is understood in this special sense. But even if our description of Snowden's perspective possesses this Fregean ambiguity, little will turn on it and so for presentational reasons I will usually not bother to resolve it.

Let us admit this notion of perspective. I would then like to suggest that there is reason to accept the following principle:

**Veridicality** For any  $\varphi$ ,  $\varphi$  iff from my perspective,  $\varphi$ .

Put another way, what is the case is aligned with my perspective.

This formulation of the principle involves quantification into sentence position. We might alternatively formulate the principle without such quantification by saying that for any proposition  $p$ ,  $p$  is true iff from my perspective  $p$  is true. (Recall that we admit both perspectival and non-perspectival propositions.)

To see the plausibility of the principle we need only consider cases. For example, not only is it the case that I am thinking, it is also the case from my perspective that I am thinking. Or again, not only is it the case from my perspective that the moon is closer than the sun, it is also the case that the moon is closer than the sun. Again, not only is it the case that snow is white, it is also the case from my perspective that snow is white. In general, then, it seems that what is the case is aligned with my perspective—that is, that the principle of veridicality holds.

It is important to bear in mind that the notion of perspective involved in the principle is the metaphysical one. The corresponding principle involving the epistemic notion would not be plausible. For my epistemic perspective may misrepresent the world: the world may not be the way I take it to be. A metaphysical perspective, by contrast, is not a representation of the world and so there is no possibility of misrepresentation.<sup>21</sup>

All the same, the principle might be challenged. In particular, one might have a concern about its right-to-left direction. For even if  $\varphi$  is the case from my perspective, what if there is someone  $s$  from whose perspective  $\varphi$  is not the case? How then can it be maintained that  $\varphi$  is

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<sup>21</sup>I must leave for another time the question of how precisely the relationship between the epistemic and metaphysical notions should be understood.

the case? Of course, if the relevant notion of perspective were epistemic there would be no difficulty here:  $s$  might simply be mistaken. But if there are two *metaphysical* perspectives that disagree over  $\varphi$ , then how can it be the case that  $\varphi$ ?

I cannot defend any particular answer to this question here. I only wish to insist that there must be some answer.<sup>22</sup> It is implausible that claims over which there is metaphysical-perspectival disagreement should be rejected on that basis. Imagine, for example, that we discover intelligent beings who inhabit a planet in orbit around Proxima Centauri. Although from my perspective the sun is closer than Proxima Centauri, from the perspective of one of these beings the reverse is true. But the discovery of such beings would hardly show that the sun is not, after all, closer than Proxima Centauri.

This point can be strengthened. The special theory of relativity is naturally taken to entail that the simultaneity of events is a perspectival matter. Suppose that this theory is true and that at midnight Greenwich Mean Time fireworks are set off in both London and Edinburgh in celebration of the new year. From my perspective the fireworks are simultaneous. But suppose further that we discover that technologically advanced extraterrestrials have been surveilling Earth from near-light-speed spacecraft. From the perspective of one of these extraterrestrials the fireworks may well fail to be simultaneous. There are, then, two metaphysical perspectives that disagree over whether the fireworks are simultaneous. But the discovery of such surveillance would do nothing to show that the fireworks are not, after all, simultaneous. Still less would there be any pressure to jettison ordinary claims about, for example, the lengths of familiar objects or the durations of familiar processes, though given relativity these too are naturally taken to be matters of perspective. How could all these utterly quotidian claims be plausibly rejected?

These cases bring out the strength of our commitment to the right-to-left direction of the principle of veridicality. One feels no temptation to abandon it even when confronted with the existence of another perspective that disagrees with one's own.

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<sup>22</sup>Candidates include the external relativism of Fine (2005), the fragmentalism of Fine (2005) and Lipman (2016), the egocentric presentism of Hare (2009) and the subjectivism of Merlo (2016).

There is no one else for whom a corresponding principle holds. That is, if  $t$  is someone else, then the principle ‘for any  $\varphi$ ,  $\varphi$  iff from the perspective of  $t$ ,  $\varphi$ ’ should not be accepted. After all, the principle of veridicality says that what is the case is aligned with my perspective. The corresponding principle for  $t$  can therefore hold only if her perspective completely agrees with my own. But it does not. For at the very least, it is the case from my perspective, but not from that of  $t$ , that I am not  $t$  (equivalently: that I\* am not  $t$ ).

What is the case, then, is aligned with my perspective and no one else’s. We may say on this basis that I am *veridical*. In this sense, the world is centered on me.

Although I (alone) am veridical, this need not be taken to entail that I am somehow privileged over anyone else. For everyone is veridical from her own perspective. To see this, note first that since I am veridical, the principle of veridicality yields the conclusion that from my perspective I am veridical (equivalently: I\* am veridical). Second, recall that the notion of perspective is immersive. If I ‘inhabit’ the perspective of someone  $s$ , I can run through the above reasoning in just the way I have already done, with corresponding results. There is thus reason to say that from the perspective of  $s$  I\* am veridical.

### 3 A defense of contingentism

The contingentist is now in a position to introduce the modal distinction that is the key to her response to the challenge to her view. To begin, it will be agreed on all sides that there is a sense in which it is impossible that someone else should be veridical. To see this, notice first that it is no accident that the principle of veridicality holds. Think of the cases given above in support of the principle; others could be supplied without limit. They demonstrate a pattern of alignment: something is the case if and only if it is the case from my perspective. It is surely no accident that this pattern obtains.

Consider now someone else  $s$ . It is also no accident that what is the case from the perspective of  $s$  differs somehow from what is the case from my perspective. After all, every morning I wake up and once again find that I am not  $s$ , and so it is no accident that from my perspective I am not

$s$  (equivalently:  $I^*$  am not  $s$ ). Yet it is also surely no accident that from the perspective of  $s$  it is *not* the case that  $I^*$  am not  $s$ .

Since it is no accident that what is the case is aligned with my perspective, and since it is no accident that  $s$ 's perspective differs from my own, there is a kind of necessity to the claim that what is the case is *not* aligned with  $s$ 's perspective. Put another way, there is a sense in which it is not possible that  $s$  should be veridical. Since this is a sense of possibility in which no one else can be veridical, let us call it the proprial sense of possibility (from *proprius*, 'own'). In this sense, the world could not have been centered on someone else.

Although the contingentist should concede that in this proprial sense it is not possible that someone else should be veridical, she may insist that there is also a sense in which this *is* possible. Her best defense of this claim, I believe, will appeal to the following principle:

**No one's perspective is impossible** For any  $s$  and  $\varphi$ , if from the perspective of  $s$  it is the case that  $\varphi$ , then it is possible that  $\varphi$ .

If there is someone  $s$  from whose perspective the world is a certain way, then it cannot be impossible for the world to be that way. After all, from  $s$ 's perspective it already is that way! She is, if you like, living proof of this possibility.

I would not wish to claim, nor do I believe, that this principle is obviously true. But it has some intuitive appeal. It is certainly not absurd or even implausible. And if the contingentist adopts it, then she has the means for a creditable defense of her position.

The principle, however, must be properly understood if it is not to be rejected out of hand. The sense of possibility involved in the principle cannot be the proprial one. For clearly from the perspective of someone else  $s$ ,  $s$  is veridical, and yet it is not proprially possible that  $s$  should be veridical. The principle must therefore be taken to involve some other sense of possibility: a *nonproprial* sense.<sup>23</sup>

We must also bear in mind that the relevant notion of perspective is again metaphysical rather than epistemic. The principle does *not* say

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<sup>23</sup>I believe we can recognize a temporal counterpart of the present distinction between proprial and nonproprial possibility. The present distinction is therefore more precisely regarded as a distinction between *perspectivally* proprial and nonproprial senses of possibility. I hope to develop the temporal distinction further in future work.

that it is always possible for the world to be the way someone takes it to be. It does not entail, for instance, that if someone takes water to be XYZ rather than H<sub>2</sub>O then it is possible that water should be XYZ. The principle rather says that if the world is a certain way from someone's perspective *regardless* of how she takes it to be, then it must be possible for the world to be that way.

If we allow the contingentist this principle, then it will be possible that someone else should be veridical. For from the perspective of someone else *s*, *s* is veridical, and so the principle entails that it is possible that *s* should be veridical. In this sense, the world could have been centered on someone else.

This argument must not be misunderstood. The conclusion is not that it is possible that *I* should not be veridical. For no matter who *s* is, it will be true from *s*'s perspective that I\* am veridical (equivalently: that I am veridical). Applying the principle to *s* will therefore not entail that it is possible that I should not be veridical; quite the contrary. Instead, the conclusion of the argument is simply that for someone *s* such that I am not *s*, it is possible that *s* should be veridical.

The contingentist may now give her response to the challenge. She may concede that it is not possible in the proprial sense that I should be someone else, such as poor Fred. For it is proprially necessary both that I am veridical and that Fred is not. She may insist, however, that in the nonproprial sense my being Fred is possible. After all, it is nonproprially possible that Fred should be veridical and thus that what is the case should be aligned with Fred's perspective. And surely it is nonproprially necessary that from Fred's perspective, I\* am Fred (equivalently: I am Fred). It is therefore nonproprially possible that I should be Fred.

What if the contingentist takes our description of Fred's perspective to possess the Fregean form of ambiguity mentioned above? She will then think that it is the case from Fred's perspective that I<sub>Fred</sub> am Fred, where 'I<sub>Fred</sub>' is understood in the special sense of 'I' in which Fred is presented to himself. And she may think there is no other sense of 'I' in which from Fred's perspective I am Fred. The fact that from Fred's perspective I<sub>Fred</sub> am Fred, together with the principle that no one's perspective is impossible, will then entail that it is possible that I<sub>Fred</sub> should be Fred. But it will not entail that it is possible that I should be Fred in any other sense

of 'I', including the special sense in which MG is presented to himself. The Fregean contingentist may therefore need to qualify her endorsement of contingentism in a way that her non-Fregean counterpart will not.

The contingentist's defense of her view has involved a crucial appeal to the principle that no one's perspective is impossible. Because the principle ranges over all subjects, it yields a strong form of the view. For the strong contingentist, not only is it possible to be someone else, it is possible to be anyone at all, even poor Fred. But one might wish to restrict the range of the principle to certain subjects, the Ss, so as to say only that none of the Ss has an impossible perspective. Such a restricted principle would yield a correspondingly weaker form of contingentism which entails only that it is possible to be one of the Ss.

Indeed, it is only a weaker form of contingentism that is presupposed by those philosophers who think it possible that I should become someone else through a transformative choice. For they need admit only that it is possible to be anyone who might result from my making such a choice, rather than that it is possible to be anyone at all. They may thus defend their view solely by appeal to a restricted version of the principle: no one who might result from my making a transformative choice has an impossible perspective.

The contingentist views identity in the way most philosophers have viewed the laws of nature. Such laws are often thought to be necessary in one sense but contingent in another. Thus it is thought that there is a sense in which the energy of an isolated system must remain constant but also a sense in which it is possible for it to increase or decrease. The contingentist thinks the same about who I am. There is a sense in which I must be MG, but there is also a sense in which it is possible that I should be someone else.

This analogy can, I believe, be pursued further. The form of necessity that the laws have has been thought to be somehow less strict than the form of necessity that they lack. Thus although it is necessary that energy is conserved, it is 'even more' necessary that two and two are four. No matter what the laws are, after all, two and two will still be four. In a similar way, the contingentist should take the proprial form of necessity, which my identity has, to be less strict than the nonproprial form of necessity, which my identity lacks. Thus although it is necessary that I am

MG, it is ‘even more’ necessary that, for instance, everyone is veridical from her own perspective. No matter who I am, this claim about veridicality will still obtain.

Both the contingentist and her opponent, I have argued, should see the world as centered on me. Moreover, both should see this centering as an immutable feature of reality. Yet for the contingentist it is, for all that, not *so* immutable. There is a sense in which the world might shift on its axis—a sense in which someone else might be found at its center. Although I have the perspective of MG, and have it necessarily, it is nonetheless possible that I should instead have the perspective of another.<sup>24</sup>

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