GENERALIST TRANSWORLD IDENTITISM (OR, IDENTITY
THROUGH POSSIBLE WORLDS WITHOUT NONQUALITATIVE
THISNESSES)

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Abstract
A certain argument has been given in the literature to the effect
that generalism (the view that all facts about all possible worlds
can (in principle) be given in general terms, that is, without resort-
ing to nonqualitative thisnesses) excludes transworld identitism (the
view that there are numerical identities through possible worlds).
It follows from this argument, among other things, that transworld
identitism entails Scotistic haecceitism (acceptance of nonqualita-
tive thisnesses), and that generalists subscribing to de reism (the
view that there are true modal statements *de re*) are committed to
counterpartism (the view that sameness through worlds is not nu-
merical identity). The purpose of this paper is to resist the argu-
ment in question by constructing generalist transworld identitism,
that is, by providing an account involving identities through possi-
ble worlds, without resorting to nonqualitative thisnesses.

1. *Introduction*

De reism is the view that there are true, or at least potentially true, modal
statements *de re*, that is, statements which are about the *same* individual in
different possible worlds, in some sense of 'same'. *Transworld identitism*
is the view that 'same' is to be understood here as (numerical) identity, or,
in general, that there are identities through possible worlds. *Counterpartism*
is the competing form of de reism, holding that sameness through possible
worlds must be couched by means of a relation weaker than identity, such
as resemblance or similarity.[1] Finally, *generalism* is the view that all facts

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[1] Modality *de re* is sometimes defined in a way that presupposes transworld identitism
(for example, in David Kaplan, "How to Russell a Frege-Church", *Journal of Philosophy*
72(19) (Nov. 1975), 716–29). However, it is obvious that a counterpartist may accept as true
a *de re* statement such as "Nothing is necessarily red" (with a natural separation of this from

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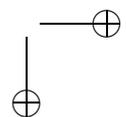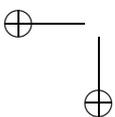
about all worlds can be given in wholly general terms, or in terms of (purely) *qualitative* properties or *suchnesses*. A property is a suchness, according to a linguistic criterion provided by R.M. Adams, if its expression is fully descriptional, without involving any particular individuals, or, more precisely, "if and only if it could be expressed, in a language sufficiently rich, without the aid of such referential devices as proper names, proper adjectives and verbs (such as 'Leibnizian' and 'pegasizes'), indexical expressions, and referential uses of definite descriptions".[2] (It is to be noted that 'being identical to something' as well as 'being distinct from something' qualify as suchnesses, unlike 'being (identical to) Socrates' and 'being distinct from Socrates'.)

The issues to be considered in this paper are often couched in terms of *haecceitism*.[3] However, there appears to be some terminological confusion about the very words 'haecceitism', 'haecceity' and 'thisness'. Kaplan, for instance, seems to include the acceptance of nonqualitative (or primitive) thisnesses in haecceitism: "Haecceitism holds that we can meaningfully speak of a thing itself — without reference either explicit, implicit, vague, or precise to individuating concepts (other than being *this* thing), defining qualities, essential attributes, or any other of the paraphernalia that enable us to distinguish one thing from another" (Kaplan, p. 723). Adams (p. 9) and Cover & O'Leary-Hawthorne (Ch. 4), on the other hand, count Leibniz, in spite of his rejection of nonqualitative thisnesses, as a haecceitist (on the

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the respective (false) *de dicto* statement "Necessarily, nothing is red") — that is, be a de reist — with an explanation that this *de re* statement is true since no actual thing is such that all of its counterparts are red.

[2] Robert M. Adams, "Primitive Thisness and Primitive Identity", *Journal of Philosophy* 76(1) (Jan. 1979), p. 7. Adams (pp. 7–8) gives also a "possibly more illuminating" explication of suchnesses as "properties that are, in certain senses, general [...] and nonrelational", or, more precisely, as "logical or epistemic constructions" of *basic suchnesses*, with a basic suchness characterized as "a property that satisfies the following three conditions. (1) It is not a thisness and not equivalent to one. (2) It is not a property of being related in one way or another to one or more particular individuals (or to their thisnesses). This is not to deny that some basic suchnesses are in a sense relational [.... For example] the property of being a homeowner is a basic suchness, although relational, because having it does not depend on which particular home one owns. (3) A basic suchness is not a property of being identical with or related in one way or another to an extensionally defined set that has an individual among its members, or among its members' members, or among its members' members' members, etc."

[3] For instance, in Kaplan, "How to Russell", and in Jan A. Cover & John O'Leary-Hawthorne, *Substance and Individuation in Leibniz: An Essay in Metaphysics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), Ch. 4.

basis that Leibniz is, with his complete individual notions, naturally taken to be committed to the view that the totality of an individual's (or substance's) suchnesses forms its thisness or haecceity). Kaplan's conception, with its commitment to nonqualitative thisnesses, may be called *Scotistic* haecceitism, reserving 'haecceitism' (*simpliciter*) for the view that allows the construction of thisnesses out of suchnesses (as in Leibniz).

According to an argument, to be discussed below, generalism and transworld identitism are incompatible with each other. It follows from this argument, quite significantly,
(i) that a transworld identitist cannot be a generalist but must accept nonqualitative thisnesses — that is, be a Scotistic haecceitist — and thus (irreducible) "singular facts" (facts involving such thisnesses),
(ii) that a generalist subscribing to de reism is committed to counterpartism (assuming that transworld identitism and counterpartism are the exhaustive alternatives under de reism), and
(iii) that, since the *theory of direct reference* (the view that proper names, for instance, refer to numerically the same individual in all possible worlds, or, perhaps more properly put, refer irrespective of worlds[4]) surely entails transworld identitism, it also entails non-generalism, that is, the advocacy of (irreducible) nonqualitative thisnesses; accordingly, a direct reference theorist must accept (something to the same effect as) Russell-Kaplan "singular propositions", or "propositions which contain individuals as immediate constituents" (Kaplan, "How to Russell", p. 724)[5]

The purpose of this paper is to show, by means of constructing generalist transworld identitism, that the argument in question (for the incompatibility of generalism and transworld identitism) is not sound. Thus, the just-mentioned important consequences fail (that is, fail in so far as this argument is at issue).[6]

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[4] See here David Kaplan, "Demonstratives: An Essay on the Semantics, Logic, Metaphysics, and Epistemology of Demonstratives and Other Indexicals", in Joseph Almog, John Perry & Howard Wettstein (eds), *Themes from Kaplan* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), pp. 492–7.

[5] Cf. also Adams, pp. 10–11.

[6] Of course, the indispensability of nonqualitative thisnesses, singular truths, etc., might be argued for by other means as well. Here I am concerned only with a particular line of argument.

2. *Argument against generalist transworld identitism*

The claim, referred to above, that transworld identitism and generalism are incompatible with each other, is implied in Kaplan's influential paper mentioned above: Kaplan ("How to Russell", pp. 724–5) argues that (i) transworld identitism entails Scotistic haecceitism (p. 725), that (ii) the latter entails the acceptance of singular propositions (p. 724), and that (iii) this acceptance entails non-generalism (p. 724). My discussion, however, will relate more closely to the clear argument (without any explicit mention of any form of haecceitism) provided by Cover and O'Leary-Hawthorne in the following passage (Cover & O'Leary-Hawthorne, pp. 146–8):

> Suppose that all the truths about any possible world could be captured by such general propositions [that is, by those not involving nonqualitative thisnesses]. In supposing this, it may help to imagine a being — an omniscient Being, say — that surveys all logically possible states of affairs and conceives of each possible world in terms of a book or list of general propositions of quantificational form [for instance, 'There is an individual having suchnesses F and G and ...']. And suppose now that one were to ask this being: is there anything that exists, or that could exist, which is essentially red, that is, red at each possible world where it exists? It seems clear enough that our imagined being would not only be unable to answer this question, but moreover would be unable to make much sense of it. Nothing within any list nor any comparison among them can serve to ground the truth or falsehood of the statement 'There is something that is essentially red.' For if the full truth at all worlds is general, there will be no determinate fact of the matter whether the thing that is F and G and H ... in world W is, or isn't, the thing that is F and G and H ... in world W*. In short, purely general propositions look to contain no resources for tracking a particular object across lists or worlds: the concept of transworld identity, and with it the traditional *de re* modal notions of essence and accident, have been lost. [...] The lesson to be learned is that in order to make sense of transworld identity claims, one needs to make room for singular propositions [...].[7]

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[7] Even though Cover and O'Leary-Hawthorne's subsequent discussion relate mainly to Leibniz's views, there appears to be nothing in this argument that is peculiarly Leibnizian.

As a simple example, let us consider the following S5-model with two worlds (w and u), two individuals (a and b), and two suchnesses (F and G):

(P)   In w, a is FG (that is, is F and is G) and b is $\sim FG$ (that is, is not-F and is G), while in u, a is $F\sim G$ and b is $\sim F\sim G$.

Here and below, representations such as P are to be taken with an understanding that they are comprehensive, embracing the "whole structure of possibility". (In terms of the "imagined Being" in the quote above, they represent the totality of what this Being conceives of.)[8]

A generalist cannot reply to the challenge posited in the passage quoted above by saying that in P the selfsame individual a is said to be FG in w and $F\sim G$ in u — for this is, in effect, to take 'a' as "carrying within itself" a nonqualitative thisness (as indicated above, *being Socrates*, for instance, will not do for a generalist). Instead, a candid generalist should describe the worlds w and u (that is, provide the modal model in question) in something like the following manner:

(PG0) w: A unique individual is FG and another unique individual is $\sim FG$.
          u: A unique individual is $F\sim G$ and another unique individual is $\sim F\sim G$.

Now, the point made by Cover and O'Leary-Hawthorne is, I gather, that there are, represented in PG0, no facts of the matter which would "support" transworld identities, for no truth entailing a transworld identity can be derived from PG0. In simple terms, on the basis of PG0 alone we have no answer to the question, *why* should the FG of w (or the $\sim FG$ of w) be identical to the $F\sim G$ of u or to the $\sim F\sim G$ of u. On PG0, a generalist de reist must resort to a counterpart account of some sort or other: she must stipulate, as it were, that, say, the FG of w is the counterpart of (and thus "the same" as) the $F\sim G$ of u, and the $\sim FG$ of w the counterpart of the $\sim F\sim G$ of u. As the counterpartist must surely concede, these are not transworld identities in the strict, numerical sense.

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[8] Of course, while P gives an acceptable modal model in our contemporary modal logic, it is not what Leibniz, for instance, has in mind when he talks about possible worlds and their totality (there are more possible worlds than just two and they are all immensely more complex than our w and u). The purpose of the simple model provided in P is illustration only.
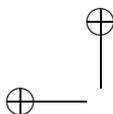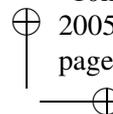
3. *Construction of generalist transworld identitism*

It will be shown now how transworld identities can, after all, be retained under generalism (that is, without positing nonqualitative thisnesses). The clearest way of doing this is to develop our simple example PG0 further, by taking the worlds w and u appropriately into account, as follows:

(PG1)   A unique individual x and another unique individual y are such that
(i) in w, x is FG while y is $\sim FG$, and
(ii) in u, x is $F\sim G$ while y is $\sim F\sim G$.

A generalist might suggest that this gives the desired relevant transworld identities (for both a and b) in general terms, without appealing to nonqualitative thisnesses (of either a or b). However, Cover and O'Leary-Hawthorne (p. 168) do consider, in effect, something like the construction just given as a possible strategy for a generalist transworld identitist. Cover and O'Leary-Hawthorne reject such a construction (*qua* generalist transworld identitism) on the basis that it works only at the expense of "invoking a haecceistic conception of worlds" (Cover & O'Leary-Hawthorne, p. 168) — that is, PG1 is really not fully generalistic since it involves nonqualitative thisnesses of possible worlds (in PG1, 'w' and 'u' are, in effect, proper names of worlds). While Cover and O'Leary-Hawthorne are absolutely right about this — PG1 is not generalistic enough — it should be noted that they do allow this approach as an acceptable generalistic *attempt* to resolve the issue; they do not reject it as something inherently misguided, but argue only that it does not really help since it ultimately appeals to "nonqualitative thisnesses of worlds" of the sort expressed in 'being Charley' (where 'Charley' is a proper name of a definite world). So, perhaps this approach may be developed further, to get rid of its inherent "world-singularism". And this appears to be a simple task, for the following is here evidently an acceptable way of representing P:

> A unique world z and another unique world s are such that
> (i) in z, a is FG while b is $\sim FG$, and
> (ii) in s, a is $F\sim G$ while b is $\sim F\sim G$.

Combining, as it were, this and PG1 gives us the following:

(PG2)   A unique individual x and another unique individual y, and a unique world z and another unique world s, are such that
(i) in z, x is FG while y is $\sim FG$, and
(ii) in s, x is $F\sim G$ while y is $\sim F\sim G$.
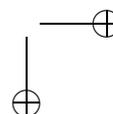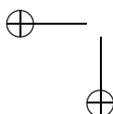
This PG2 appears as just as good a way of providing the relevant modal model as is P. However, PG2 does not involve even world-singularism but is a strictly generalist description of the "whole of possibility" (with respect to this particular example): it gives us all "possible states of affairs" (concerning two definite individuals) in general terms, without resorting to nonqualitative thisnesses of the sort expressed by 'being Socrates' or 'being Charley'. Nevertheless, we have transworld identities in this wholly generalist PG2. For instance, a statement like "There is something that is essentially red" (cf. the long quote from Cover & O'Leary-Hawthorne above) is here (transworld identitistically) true, for it follows from PG2 (taken together with the comprehensiveness assumption) that something numerically the same is F in every world there is (in this model). All in all, there is, *pace* Cover and O'Leary-Hawthorne, no inconsistency in generalist transworld identitism, that is, in the combination of the denial of nonqualitative thisnesses with identity through possible worlds.

4. *Objections*

It may be claimed, as an objection to the construction just given, that PG2 betrays generalism in that in PG2 each locution "another unique" introduces another thing that is "primitively distinct" from a thing with respect to which it is said to be "another". Basically, this objection amounts to the claim that 'being distinct from something', or, more relevantly to PG2, 'being F so that another thing is G', is incompatible with generalism. However, since 'being distinct from something' expresses a suchness (as pointed out in Section 1 above), so does 'being F so that another thing is G', and thus does not involve anything nonqualitative (on the assumption that F and G are generalistic). After all, generalism is not the view that we cannot think of there being separate individuals at all — it is only the view that there are no need for nonqualitative thisnesses.

According to another objection, PG2, in containing quantifications ranging over possible worlds, improperly utilizes "transworld facts" (such as 'Something is F in some world and $\sim F$ in some other world'). However, it is hard to see why this should be a problem in generalism, for quantifications ranging over worlds are no more un-generalistic than those ranging over other types of entities. The question under discussion is whether generalism and transworld identitism are compatible with each other, not whether "transworld facts" are acceptable.

A closely related potential objection is that PG2 resorts to unacceptable *world-indexed* properties, such as the property of being w-snubnosed (where

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'w' refers to a possible world). Indeed, Cover and O'Leary-Hawthorne (p. 168) relate the strategy utilized in PG1 to the well-known approach, involving world-indexed properties, to Leibniz's problems with identity through possible worlds.[9] Reply: Arguably, a representation such as 'in w, x is FG' is quite innocuous and need not, as such, be taken as committing one to "world-indexed properties", and, in any case, PG2 appears as a perfectly acceptable way of providing a modal model. Secondly, even if PG2 did utilize world-indexed properties, what is it that is so bad about them? Generalism itself, that is, the denial of (irreducible) nonqualitative thisnesses, seems not to contain anything that is inconsistent with positing such properties. Further, there aren't (to my knowledge) any decisive arguments against the well-known treatment of modal issues in terms of world-indexed properties.[10]

All in all, it seems plausible to conclude that generalism (denial of nonqualitative thisness) and transworld identitism (acceptance of numerical identities through worlds) are compatible, and, subsequently, that the argument discussed above is mistaken.

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[9] The earliest appearances of this strategy in Leibniz literature can be found, to my knowledge, in Alvin Plantinga, "World and Essence", *Philosophical Review* 79(4) (1970), pp. 486–90; Robert Grimm, "Individual Concepts and Contingent Truths", *Studia Leibnitiana* 2 (1970); and Benson Mates, "Individuals and Modality in the Philosophy of Leibniz", *Studia Leibnitiana* 4 (1972), p. 109.

[10] See, for instance, Alvin Plantinga, *The Nature of Necessity* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974).