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# DIVINE KNOWLEDGE AND QUALITATIVE INDISCERNIBILITY

Daniel S. Murphy

This paper is about the nature of God's pre-creation knowledge of possible creatures. I distinguish three theories: non-qualitative singularism, qualitative singularism, and qualitative generalism, which differ in terms of whether the relevant knowledge is *qualitative* or *non-qualitative*, and whether God has *singular* or merely *general* knowledge of creatures. My main aim is to argue that qualitative singularism does not depend on a version of the Principle of Identity of Indiscernibles to the effect that, necessarily, qualitatively indiscernible individuals are identical. It follows that qualitative singularism does not depend on the view that possible creatures categorically have qualitative individual essences.

## 1. Introduction

This paper is about the nature of God's pre-creation knowledge of possible creatures. By "possible creatures," I have in mind non-divine individuals (such as persons, pieces of matter, etc.). By God's "pre-creation" knowledge, I mean the knowledge God has prior to creating any such individuals. If God has a temporal mode of existence, the word "prior" can be taken in a straightforward temporal sense, and I assume there was a time at which there were no creatures and never had been any. If God has an atemporal mode of existence, "prior" can be taken in some sort of logical or metaphysical sense. Inasmuch as God timelessly acts on the basis of some sort of knowledge of what he might timelessly do, we can ask about the nature of that knowledge. I assume a robust conception of creation, on which God's creating something involves bringing about its existence (or being, etc.), as opposed to merely conferring some property, such as "actuality," on an antecedently existing (or real, etc.) thing. I also assume that something must exist if it is to stand in a relation. So, God's pre-creation knowledge of a creature cannot consist in the holding of any cognitive relation between God and that individual. For were God to bear, prior to creation, such a relation to that individual, he would know, prior to creation, that it exists (or will exist, or "will" exist), in which case he



would not be in a position to *decide* whether to create it.<sup>1</sup> So what, then, does the relevant knowledge consist in?

This is my topic. My main aim is to defend a theory of pre-creation knowledge on which such knowledge is both *qualitative* and *singular*. This kind of theory, which I will call *qualitative singularism*, has been advanced before,<sup>2</sup> but attached to metaphysical views that many find implausible. I will argue that qualitative singularism can be severed from these attachments. Specifically, I will argue that it does not depend on a qualitative version of the “Principle of the Identity of Indiscernibles” to the effect that, necessarily, individuals with identical qualitative properties are numerically identical. It follows that qualitative singularism does not imply that possible creatures categorically have qualitative “individual essences.” If I am right, the prospects for qualitative singularism are enhanced, since there is good reason to reject the relevant version of the identity of indiscernibles. And it would be good for qualitative singularism’s prospects to be enhanced, for alternative theories face problems—or so I will suggest, without pretending to refute them.

## 2. Preliminaries

Suppose God creates a piece of matter, Matt. What is the nature of God’s pre-creation knowledge of Matt? Though it cannot consist in God’s bearing any relation to Matt, it could consist in his bearing a relation to some sort of *proxy*, *p*, for Matt. The idea would be that *p*, unlike Matt, exists prior to creation, and is such that God’s bearing a particular relation to *it* intuitively constitutes knowledge of Matt. It is not clear that this sort of account of God’s pre-creation knowledge of something, on which such knowledge consists in his bearing a relation to a proxy or “stand-in” for it, is the only sort that might be developed. However, it has precedent,<sup>3</sup> and I find it congenial for my purposes in this paper. What might be a proxy for Matt? An initially natural thought is that such a proxy will be an *individual essence* of Matt (hereafter I may elide the word “individual”), by which I mean a property the having of which is necessary and sufficient for being Matt.

With this proxy account of divine knowledge in hand, I now want to draw two distinctions between kinds of theories.

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<sup>1</sup>There are complications here due to possible views about God’s relation to time, the nature of the time to which he is related, the relation between relations and time (e.g., whether a relation’s relata need exist at the same time), and whether there can be facts “prior to” God’s knowing them. Our assumed conception of creation implies that no creature exists-prior-to-creation, i.e., is “located there.” However, one might think this is consistent with its being the case, prior to creation, that a creature exists (by virtue of being located at a later time), or will exist, or “will” (in an irreducibly metaphysical sense) exist. Thanks to a referee for getting me to sharpen the text’s argument, which is designed to accommodate all the relevant subtleties.

<sup>2</sup>For example, by Leibniz (see Adams, “Primitive Thisness and Primitive Identity,” 9–13) and, more recently, Linda Zagzebski (“Individual Essence and the Creation”).

<sup>3</sup>This sort of account was employed by Aquinas and others (see Zagzebski, “Individual Essence and the Creation,” 135–136, 142–143; and Menzel, “Temporal Actualism and Singular Foreknowledge,” 479–487), and for more recent executions, see, in addition to Zagzebski and Menzel themselves, e.g., Kvanvig, *The Possibility of an All-Knowing God*, 122.

There is an intuitive distinction between *qualitative* and *non-qualitative* properties, relations, and propositions (or facts, or states of affairs). Let us call anything that is a property, relation, or proposition a *matter*. It is commonly said that non-qualitative matters “involve” or are “about” *particular* concrete particulars in some sort of *direct* way. This gloss suggests that non-qualitative matters include, for example, the property of being Obama, the relation of sitting next to Biden earlier than, and the proposition that Obama and Biden are five feet apart; and that qualitative matters include, for example, the property of being blue, the proposition that there are two individuals that are five feet apart, and the proposition that sphericity is instantiated.<sup>4</sup>

However, I think directly involving a particular concrete particular is merely sufficient for a matter’s being non-qualitative. Consider the property of being Matt, or of being identical to Matt. Call this an *identity property*.<sup>5</sup> Identity properties for individuals are non-qualitative. Now let us say that a *haecceity* would, were there such things, be a primitive property the having of which determines the possessor’s being the very entity it is.<sup>6</sup> If Matt has a haecceity, it would not be its identity property, but something the having of which *explains* its having its identity property. I think haecceities for individuals would be non-qualitative (one may even be tempted to use the word “non-qualitative” in explicating them), but it is not clear that they directly involve particular individuals.

We may not need informative necessary and sufficient conditions for a matter’s being qualitative or non-qualitative. For one thing, we might take the distinction to be primitive.<sup>7</sup> Perhaps we can go some way toward better elucidating it by invoking the idea of universality or generality.<sup>8</sup> Intuitively, the reason a haecceity for an individual would fail to be qualitative is that it would be both (a) equivalent with the identity property of an individual and (b) primitive, i.e., such that its instantiation would not consist in anything further. Relatively simple qualitative properties like *being blue* or *being five feet away from something* are multiply-exemplifiable, and hence fail to satisfy (a). And while a qualitative essence of an individual would satisfy (a), it would presumably fail to satisfy (b),

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<sup>4</sup>The words “qualitative” and “non-qualitative” are not always used to get at the distinction I am after. For example, Katherine Hawley extends “non-qualitative” to matters involving the identity and parthood relations (“Identity and Indiscernibility,” 102). On this use, not only is the proposition that Obama and Biden are five feet apart “non-qualitative,” but the proposition that there are *two* individuals that are five feet apart is too. Alternatively, one might use “qualitative” as an adjectival form of “quality” (see Paul, “Building the World From Its Fundamental Constituents.”). On this use, a trope would be a “qualitative” entity, whereas on mine, no particular is qualitative or non-qualitative.

<sup>5</sup>Robert Adams calls identity properties of individuals “thisnesses” (see, e.g., his “Primitive Thisness and Primitive Identity,” 6).

<sup>6</sup>Cf., e.g., Adams, “Actualism and Thisness,” 12–18; Cover and O’Leary-Hawthorne, *Substance and Individuation in Leibniz*, 278; and Lowe, “Individuation,” 86–89.

<sup>7</sup>Adams, “Primitive Thisness and Primitive Identity,” 9.

<sup>8</sup>*Ibid.*, 7–8.

since it would presumably be a rather complex property the instantiation of which consists in the instantiation of simpler, multiply-exemplifiable qualitative features. But by virtue of a haecceity's satisfying (a) and (b), there seems to be no generality or universality about it, even if it would not directly involve any individuals *per se*. For present purposes, however, it should suffice to say that any matter that directly involves a particular concrete particular or a haecceity for one, or that is such a haecceity, is non-qualitative.

We can apply the qualitative/non-qualitative distinction to theories of pre-creation divine knowledge in the following way. On the *qualitative* theory, such knowledge is categorically qualitative, in the sense that the proxies with which God is acquainted are categorically qualitative matters. For example, one might think God is acquainted with qualitative essences of creatures. On the *non-qualitative* theory, the relevant knowledge is at least partly non-qualitative, in the sense that at least some proxies are non-qualitative. For example, one might think God is acquainted with non-qualitative essences of creatures, such as identity properties or haecceities.

The second distinction I want to focus on is that between *singularist* and *generalist* theories of pre-creation knowledge.<sup>9</sup> On the singularist theory, the relevant knowledge is categorically singular, whereas on the generalist theory, it is at least partly merely general (hereafter I will elide the word "merely"). Consider Matt again. As a first pass, we might say that the difference between God's having singular knowledge and his having general knowledge of Matt turns on whether the knowledge that constitutes knowledge of Matt *conflates Matt with another possible creature*. If it does, it is general, and it is singular otherwise. And an initially intuitive way to make sense of whether the knowledge conflates Matt with another possible creature is in terms of whether Matt and any other possible creature *share a proxy*. If so, God's pre-creation knowledge conflates Matt with another possible creature, resulting in general knowledge of Matt.<sup>10</sup>

Though I take the singularist/generalist distinction and the qualitative/non-qualitative distinction to be orthogonal, I see no reason to adopt

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<sup>9</sup>See Menzel, "Temporal Actualism and Singular Foreknowledge."

<sup>10</sup>Strictly speaking, there *are no* merely possible creatures to *have* proxies. Suppose we take proxies to be properties possibly had by that for which they proxy. If *P* proxies for Matt, we may make sense of the sentence "Matt and a merely possible creature share *P* as a proxy" in terms of the claim that *P* is both possibly such that Matt has it and possibly such that something *x* that is not Matt has it. If *P* is like this, acquaintance with *P* constitutes general knowledge of Matt. But if *P* is necessarily such that anything that has it is Matt, acquaintance with *P* constitutes singular knowledge of Matt. Since Matt exists, we can now talk about God's having had, prior to creation, knowledge of *Matt*. But it may be more faithful to the pre-creation state of things to say that, prior to creation, acquaintance with *P* constitutes singular or general knowledge of *a possible creature* (or *creatures*). We may make sense of "prior to creation, two possible creatures share *P* as a proxy" in terms of the claim that, prior to creation, *P* is possibly such that something *x* both has *P* and is possibly such that something *y* that is not *x* has *P*. If *P* is like this, acquaintance with *P* constitutes general knowledge of some possible creatures. But if *P* is possibly such that something *x* both has *P* and is necessarily such that anything *y* that has *P* is *x*, acquaintance with *P* constitutes singular knowledge of a possible creature.

non-qualitative generalism. For if non-qualitative knowledge of possible creatures is granted, there seems to be no barrier to singular knowledge. So I see the main contenders as non-qualitative singularism, qualitative singularism, and qualitative generalism. Though I will say a bit about why one might be unsatisfied with the first and third, my main aim is to defend the second from an objection.

Although I find the topic of this paper of intrinsic philosophical interest, let me say a bit about why it matters. First, I have argued elsewhere that Molinism depends on singularism.<sup>11</sup> The basic idea, very roughly, is that there could not be true subjunctive conditionals of creaturely freedom (in a libertarian sense) for *types* of possible creatures, but only for particular, *token* ones. So, if God is to grasp true conditionals of the relevant kind prior to creation, he must have singular knowledge of possible creatures prior to creation. Second, one might think generalism threatens the integrity of some divine attributes, such as God's knowledge and power. *Prima facie*, it seems that generalism implies that, prior to creation, the domain of what is possible *outstrips*, in some sense, the domain of what is divinely conceived, or apprehended, or entertained, etc. As such, it looks as if, prior to creation, there are some possibilities of which God is ignorant and incapable of intentionally actualizing.<sup>12</sup> Third, the topic of pre-creation divine knowledge of individuals is intimately connected with metaphysical issues concerning both the natures of individuals themselves and the ontological grounds of modal facts about them.<sup>13</sup> As such, theists interested in these metaphysical issues may find the present topic particularly interesting.

Here is the plan for what follows. In §3, I will say a bit about why one might find the non-qualitative theory unsatisfactory. In §4, I will raise a challenge for qualitative singularism concerning the apparent falsity of a particular version of the identity of indiscernibles, and explain how this might seem to motivate qualitative generalism. In §5 and §6, I will argue that qualitative singularism is in fact consistent with the relevant principle's falsity. I will wrap up in §7.

### 3. Against the Non-qualitative Theory

One reason to prefer the qualitative theory is that it is easier to see how the relevant proxies could exist prior to creation.<sup>14</sup>

Let us consider a version of the non-qualitative theory on which the proxies are identity properties of creatures. An identity property directly

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<sup>11</sup>Murphy, "Molinism, Creature-types, and the Nature of Counterfactual Implication."

<sup>12</sup>Christopher Menzel defends generalism from this kind of objection (see "Temporal Actualism and Singular Foreknowledge," 498–502).

<sup>13</sup>I borrow the phrase "ontological grounds" from a referee.

<sup>14</sup>Some work on this issue with which I will not directly interact includes Zagzebski, "Individual Essence and the Creation," 135–143; Menzel, "Temporal Actualism and Singular Foreknowledge," 489–491; Plantinga, "On Existentialism"; and the exchange between Kit Fine and Alvin Plantinga in *Alvin Plantinga*.

involves the entity that would have it, were it instantiated. What I will say about this view, however, can be applied to any version of the non-qualitative theory on which the proxies directly involve creatures. (For example, consider the property of being the product of sperm *s* and egg *e*, or the proposition that Obama exists.) This view constitutes a version of non-qualitative singularism on which there is a one-to-one correspondence between proxies and creatures: every creature has just one proxy, and (more saliently) no creatures share a proxy.

*Being Matt*     →     **Matt**  
*Being Obama*   →     **Obama**  
*Being Biden*     →     **Biden**

Let us consider Matt's identity property, i.e., *being Matt*. What is the nature of this property? Let us first suppose that the existence of *being Matt* partly consists in the existence of Matt itself. One way to develop this is to suppose that *being Matt* has Matt as a constituent. For example, perhaps the property is somehow built out of the identity relation and Matt. Or perhaps the property is to be understood as the set of its instances, i.e., {Matt}. Alternatively, perhaps the existence of *being Matt* partly consists in that of Matt for reasons unrelated to the property's ontological structure. For example, Robert Adams maintains that an identity property depends for its existence on that of its possessor, because what it is to be the identity property of a given entity is to stand in a particular relation with that entity (requiring that it exist).<sup>15</sup> So take *being Matt*. This has the property of being the identity property of Matt, and this looks like an essential property of it. Further, it seems that having the property of being the identity property of Matt consists in bearing a relation to Matt, requiring that Matt exist. So, it seems that the existence of *being Matt* partly consists in that of Matt.

Now if the existence of *being Matt* partly consists in that of Matt, it fails to constitute a viable proxy for Matt. For prior to creation, the matter itself does not exist, from which it seems to follow that, prior to creation, the property does not.<sup>16</sup>

Let us now suppose that the existence of *being Matt* does *not* partly consist in that of Matt. As I construed Adams's argument for the conclusion that an identity property depends for its existence on that of its possessor, there were two premises:

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<sup>15</sup>Adams, "Actualism and Thisness," 11.

<sup>16</sup>One might challenge this inference on the basis of the thought that Matt's *post*-creation existence suffices for *being Matt*'s *pre*-creation existence. (Cf. Kvanvig, "Adams on Actualism and Presentism.") But this would not render the property a viable proxy. For the proxy must not only exist, but also be grasped by God, prior to creation. But if the proxy's pre-creation existence were underpinned by Matt's post-creation existence, it would not be grasped prior to creation. For if God grasped it prior to creation, he would be aware, prior to creation, of its dependence on Matt's post-creation existence, in which case he would not be in a position to decide whether Matt is to exist.



- (1) *Being Matt* has *being the identity property of Matt* essentially.
- (2) Having *being the identity property of Matt* consists in bearing a relation to Matt.

However, one might deny (1) by maintaining that all that is essential to *being Matt* is that it is the identity property of Matt *if anything*—or in other words, if it is possessed at all.<sup>17</sup>

Now if the existence of *being Matt* does not partly consist in that of Matt, *being Matt* would seem to constitute a viable proxy in this sense: *were* there such a thing, it would exist prior to creation. However, now it is by no means clear that *there is* any such property. If Matt is put in front of me, I am initially sanguine with countenancing the existence of a property perspicuously expressed by the phrase “being Matt.” But I think this is because I am initially inclined to take the existence of the relevant property to partly consist in that of the individual that it involves and that is ostensibly before me. This kind of perspective generalizes and may be naturally taken to underlie the kind of casual talk about non-qualitative properties and relations (exhibited in §2) in which it is taken for granted that there *are* such things. They can be taken for granted, it seems to me, because of their constitutive connection with the individuals they involve and that are taken for granted. Now perhaps there are, *in addition* to non-qualitative features of this sort, non-qualitative features of another sort that—we may suppose—can also be picked out with the same kinds of names (e.g., the phrase “being Matt,” “sitting next to Biden earlier than,” etc.) and whose existence does *not* partly consist in that of the individuals they involve. But we have yet to see reason to think so.

If the existence of *being Matt* would not partly consist in that of Matt, we might think we are talking about a *haecceity* (see §2). Matt’s haecceity would be equivalent with *being Matt*, and, like *being Matt* on the current conception, would not be essentially had by Matt, but only essentially had by Matt if anything. Further, *being Matt* would, on the current conception, be a primitive property, for were its instantiation to consist in something further, *that* would presumably be the proxy. To be sure, I introduced haecceities as distinct from identity properties, but the distinction may collapse on certain conceptions of the latter’s nature. After arguing that identity properties depend for their existence on that of their possessors, Adams acknowledges that one might resist his argument by construing identity properties as haecceities, the non-existence for which he has separate arguments.<sup>18</sup>

It is not my intention here to argue against the existence of haecceities, or—if one wants to distinguish them—of primitive “identity properties” whose existence would be independent from that of their possessors. My aim has been, not to refute the non-qualitative theory, but to highlight a

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<sup>17</sup>Plantinga, “On Existentialism,” 5.

<sup>18</sup>Adams, “Actualism and Thisness,” 12–18. See also e.g., Lowe, “Individuation,” 88.



consideration that can be raised against it, the power of which may vary depending on one's own metaphysical leanings. The problem, as I see it, is this: the theory needs proxies that would, were they to exist at all, exist prior to creation; and yet, for any candidate conception of the proxies, the plausibility that they would be like this is inversely proportional to the plausibility that they exist at all. If the candidate proxies' existence is bound up with that of (non-divine) individuals themselves, then while there plausibly are such things, they are not around prior to creation. On the other hand, if the candidate proxies have an existence independent of that of individuals themselves, then (to repeat my leanings) it is unclear that there are such things.<sup>19</sup> And of course, it would be illegitimate to *equivocate* here, relying on one conception of the proxies in motivating their general existence and switching to another in motivating their pre-creation availability—or alternatively, to rely on a *vague* conception that inhibits an adequate examination of the general existence question or the pre-creation availability question in the first place.

#### 4. The Qualitative Theory and Qualitative Indiscernibility

Insofar as one finds the pre-creation existence of non-qualitative essences of creatures problematic, it may be natural to consider a theory of pre-creation divine knowledge on which God is acquainted with *qualitative* essences. For example, suppose there are two qualitative properties, *being F* and *being G*, each of which is essential to Matt, and the conjunction of which is sufficient for being Matt. Acquaintance with such an essence, namely *being F and G*, would intuitively constitute singular knowledge of Matt. Generalizing to other possible creatures, we get qualitative singularism. If we assume that anything that has a qualitative essence has just one, we get a version on which there is a one-to-one correspondence between proxies and creatures. (Alternatively, we might grant that something has multiple qualitative essences, but select one as its proxy.) On this view, we can take the instantiation of a creature's identity property to consist in that of its qualitative essence, and simply reject the existence of haecceities.

Now a powerful and well-known problem confronts this view. The view that possible creatures categorically have qualitative essences implies the following version of the so-called "Principle of the Identity of Indiscernibles":

(PII) Necessarily, for any individuals  $x$  and  $y$ , if  $x$  and  $y$  have identical qualitative properties, then  $x$  and  $y$  are identical.

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<sup>19</sup>See Rosenkrantz, *Haecceity*, for a defense of the existence of haecceities. Ironically (in the present context), however, Rosenkrantz denies that God could grasp them (220–224). Cf. Cover and O'Leary-Hawthorne, *Substance and Individuation in Leibniz*, 278. Propositions might be invoked as proxies instead of properties, and what I have said in this section about non-qualitative properties could be extended to non-qualitative propositions. See Plantinga, "On Existentialism," for a defense of the view that non-qualitative propositions have an existence independent of that of the individuals they involve; and for recent work on this issue, see e.g., Speaks, "On Possibly Nonexistent Propositions."

And the problem is that PII is very likely false, or so many philosophers think.

The following kind of situation can exhibit why PII seems false and why it is implied by the idea that possible creatures categorically have qualitative essences.<sup>20</sup> Consider a world (i.e., a maximal way for reality to be) in which two iron spheres come to exist *ex nihilo* at some spatial distance from each other, persist unchanged for five seconds, and then wink out of existence. Suppose they have identical qualitative properties, intrinsic and extrinsic. For example, both are iron, spherical, a particular distance from something iron and spherical, etc. This qualitative identity can be intuitively grasped in terms of the spheres' being divided by an axis of spatial symmetry, such that each is a "mirror image" of the other. Let the word "Alef" denote such a world, and "Castor" and "Pollux" its two spheres.

### Alef



Castor and Pollux satisfy, in Alef, the antecedent but not the consequent in PII. So, if Alef is a *possible* world (i.e., possible maximal way for reality to be), PII is false. Now, there admittedly are ways of trying to save PII from apparent counterexamples like Alef,<sup>21</sup> and it is not my intention to establish its falsity. My main interest in PII is to argue that qualitative singularism does not depend on it, and PII's controversial status is enough to render this significant. So I will assume that Alef is possible and PII false.

To see how PII's falsity precludes the categorical possession of qualitative essences by possible creatures, consider Castor in Alef. Since Pollux has all of Castor's qualitative properties, there is no qualitative property (however complex) the having of which is sufficient for being Castor, and hence no qualitative property the having of which is necessary and sufficient for being Castor. (*Mutatis mutandis* with Pollux.)

Now where do we go from here? This largely depends on what further metaphysical implications we take PII's falsity to have.

Adams seems to take PII's falsity to imply that "thisness hold[s] a place beside suchness as a fundamental feature of reality."<sup>22</sup> It is not entirely clear what this means, but I think the following is not unfaithful to Adams. Let

<sup>20</sup>Cf. Black, "The Identity of Indiscernibles"; and Adams, "Primitive Thisness and Primitive Identity."

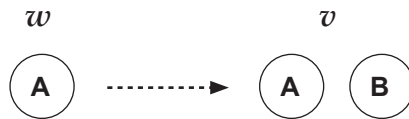
<sup>21</sup>For three tactics, see Hacking, "The Identity of Indiscernibles"; O'Leary-Hawthorne, "The Bundle Theory of Substance and the Identity of Indiscernibles"; and Hawley, "Identity and Indiscernibility." See Hawley also for general discussion. For a defense of PII in the context of defending qualitative singularism, see Zagzebski, "Individual Essence and the Creation."

<sup>22</sup>Adams, "Primitive Thisness and Primitive Identity," 5 (cf. "Actualism and Thisness," 3).

us say that thisness is fundamental just in case it is possible that there are some non-qualitative matters that do not consist in any qualitative ones, or less elliptically, just in case there are possibly some non-qualitative matters the instantiation of which (in the case of properties or relations) or the holding of which (in the case of propositions) does not consist in the instantiation or holding of any qualitative matters. Adams also thinks that PII's falsity implies, or at least suggests, that as a general matter, i.e., pre-scinding from symmetric worlds like Alef and individuals like Castor and Pollux therein, identity properties of individuals are *distinct* from qualitative properties, though he is unwilling to affirm that, as a general matter, they are *non-equivalent* with them.<sup>23</sup>

One might be inclined to draw more from PII's falsity than does Adams. For example, Christopher Menzel seems to take PII's falsity to imply, or at least strongly suggest, that virtually no possible contingent being has a qualitative essence.<sup>24</sup>

Menzel's argument goes roughly as follows.<sup>25</sup> For any possible world  $w$ , let  $w$ -minus be a sub-maximal state of affairs that is like  $w$  except that it omits "spatiotemporal totality facts," by which I mean facts to the effect that  $w$ 's spatiotemporally located individuals are *all* the individuals so located. For example, consider a world containing just a cube. The relevant sub-maximal state of affairs would omit the fact that the cube is *all* that exists in space and time, and hence *may* be compossible with, for example, the existence of another individual five feet away from the cube. Now for any possible world  $w$ , we can take there to be an "expanded" possible world  $v$  that consists of two *duplicates* (i.e., intrinsic qualitative copies)<sup>26</sup> of  $w$ -minus, "appended" in such a way as to result in a counterexample to PII. Further, we can suppose that one of  $v$ 's "halves" contains  $w$ 's individuals. For example, letting  $w$  be a world with a single sphere,  $v$  will be a two-sphere world containing  $w$ 's sphere.



Finally, for any such counterexample to PII, we can take there to be a "contracted" possible world  $u$  that consists of a duplicate of  $w$ -minus containing the individuals from  $v$ 's *other* half.

<sup>23</sup>Adams, "Primitive Thisness and Primitive Identity," 13 (cf. "Actualism and Thisness," 5).

<sup>24</sup>See Menzel, "Qualitative Essences and a Final Defense for Plantinga"; and cf. Menzel, "Temporal Actualism and Singular Foreknowledge," 492–493.

<sup>25</sup>Cf., e.g., Hawthorne, "Causal Structuralism," 374. Curiously, Menzel attributes the argument to Adams ("Primitive Thisness and Primitive Identity").

<sup>26</sup>Cf. Lewis, *On the Plurality of Worlds*, 61–62.

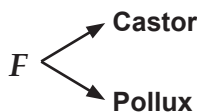


If we accept this argument, then for virtually any possible world, we can get a duplicate possible world containing different individuals. (The view that there are duplicate but distinct possible worlds has been called *haecceitism*. *Antihacceitism*, by contrast, is the view that there are no pairs of worlds that are duplicates and distinct and both possible.<sup>27</sup>) This implies that virtually no possible creature has a qualitative essence. For example, take me in the actual world. If there is a duplicate possible world that contains a different individual in my “qualitative role,” no qualitative properties I have are such that having them is sufficient—and hence necessary and sufficient—for being me.

Now let us return to pre-creation divine knowledge. We started by considering a version of qualitative singularism on which there is a one-to-one correspondence between proxies and creatures, the proxies being qualitative essences of that for which they proxy.

- $E_1 \rightarrow$  **Matt**
- $E_2 \rightarrow$  **Obama**
- $E_3 \rightarrow$  **Biden**

PII’s falsity undermines this, for it implies that at least some possible creatures lack qualitative essences. Now a *prima facie* natural move, at this point, would be to stick with the qualitative theory, stick with the idea that proxies are properties possibly had by that for which they proxy, but jettison the singularism. This can be done by supposing that proxies are properties that, in some cases, fail to constitute essences.<sup>28</sup> For example, let *F* be a very specific qualitative property had by Castor in Alef. Despite *F*’s specificity, it fails to constitute an essence of Castor, since Pollux has it too. Nevertheless, one might think *F* can proxy for Castor, i.e., that pre-creation acquaintance with *F* can intuitively constitute knowledge of Castor. Of course, if *F* proxies for Castor, it presumably proxies for Pollux too. Accordingly, the earlier entertained one-to-one correspondence between proxies and creatures breaks down when it comes to Castor and Pollux.



<sup>27</sup>See Skow, “Haecceitism, Anti-haecceitism and Possible Worlds.”

<sup>28</sup>Cf. Menzel, “Temporal Actualism and Singular Foreknowledge,” 497.

This intuitively results in God's having, prior to creation, general as opposed to singular knowledge of Castor: inasmuch as God's knowledge of Castor is constituted by acquaintance with *F*, this knowledge seems to conflate Castor with another creature, i.e., Pollux.

I defined singularism (in §2) as the view that God's pre-creation knowledge of creatures is categorically singular, and generalism as the view that it is in some cases general. While rendering singularism and generalism jointly exhaustive, this also implies that there can be versions of generalism that differ in terms of the *extent* to which the relevant knowledge is general. If we take proxies to be properties possibly had by that for which they proxy, we can understand this in terms of the extent to which proxies fail to constitute essences. Menzel advocates qualitative generalism,<sup>29</sup> and, as we have seen, seems to favor a version on which the generality is quite pervasive. Adams seems to advocate qualitative generalism,<sup>30</sup> and, as we have seen, is more agnostic about the extent of generality.

So, if one rejects PII, one might accept some version of qualitative generalism. Alternatively, one might embrace non-qualitative singularism: if God is acquainted, prior to creation, with non-qualitative essences for Castor and Pollux, he has singular knowledge of them prior to creation.

I reject both of these responses, and maintain that PII's falsity is consistent with qualitative singularism. There are two key steps to seeing how this is so, which I will elaborate upon in the next two sections respectively. They are closely related, but one can be seen as straightforwardly metaphysical, while the other arises when we turn to pre-creation divine knowledge itself. As for the metaphysics, PII's falsity does *not* imply the fundamentality of thisness: even in possible worlds like Alef, we can coherently maintain that all non-qualitative matters consist in qualitative ones. As for the theology, we can abandon the idea that proxies are uniformly *properties* possibly had by that for which they proxy. If we give this up, we can reject a one-to-one correspondence between proxies and creatures (which PII's falsity *does* require) without giving up singularism.

### 5. Metaphysics

We may say something of the form

What it is for it to be that  $\phi$  is for it to be that  $\psi$ ,

where the letters " $\phi$ " and " $\psi$ " are sentence-variables. Such a claim expresses what we might call a "real definition."<sup>31</sup> Replacing " $\phi$ " and " $\psi$ " with closed sentences yields a real definition of a proposition, namely that expressed by what replaces " $\phi$ ". For example: what it is for it to be that

<sup>29</sup>Menzel, "Temporal Actualism and Singular Foreknowledge," 494–495.

<sup>30</sup>Adams, "Actualism and Thisness," 9–10. This passage is naturally taken to espouse qualitative generalism as opposed to singularism when read in light of Adams's judgments about qualitative essences and the fundamentality of thisness (see, e.g., *ibid.*, 3, 5).

<sup>31</sup>See Rosen, "Metaphysical Dependence: Grounding and Reduction," 122–123.

a city exists is for it to be that . . . . Replacing “ $\phi$ ” and “ $\psi$ ” with open sentences yields a real definition of a property or relation. For example: what it is for it to be that  $x$  is a city is for it to be that  $x$  is . . . (where the letter “ $x$ ” is a variable, not a constant). So claims of real definition express real definitions of propositions, in the sense of conveying what it is for them to hold, or of properties or relations, in the sense of conveying what it is to instantiate them. We can connect talk of real definition with that of “consisting in” by saying that, if a matter has a real definition in terms of others, the former consists in the latter.

We can ascribe a qualitative essence to something by positing a qualitative real definition for its identity property. For example, consider Matt. We can ascribe a qualitative essence to it through a claim of the form

What it is for it to be that  $x$  is Matt is for it to be that  $\psi(x)$ ;

where “ $\psi(x)$ ” is replaced with a qualitative sentence in which the variable “ $x$ ” is free. For example, supposing there are two qualitative properties, *being F* and *being G*, each of which is essential to Matt, the conjunction of which is sufficient for being Matt, the property of being *F* and *G* is a qualitative essence of Matt. We can say

What it is for it to be that  $x$  is Matt is for it to be that  $x$  is *F* and *G*.

And we could ascribe qualitative essences to Castor and Pollux through claims of the form

(\*<sub>c</sub>) What it is for it to be that  $x$  is Castor is for it to be that  $\psi(x)$

(\*<sub>p</sub>) What it is for it to be that  $x$  is Pollux is for it to be that  $\psi(x)$ ,

in which “ $\psi(x)$ ” is replaced with a qualitative sentence in which “ $x$ ” is free. But of course, there *are no* such truths, since no qualitative property is such that having it suffices for being Castor (Pollux).

It might seem to follow that Castor’s and Pollux’s identity properties do not consist in qualitative matters. But it does not.

Here is one way to see this. Let us allow a claim of real definition to be *plural* as opposed to *singular* on the side of the *definiendum* and/or the *definiens*. For example, this kind of claim is plural on the side of the *definiendum*:

What it is for it to be that  $\phi_1$  and  $\phi_2$  is for it to be that  $\psi$ .

Now many *definiendum*-plural real definitions may hold by virtue of a plurality of *definiendum*-singular ones. For example, one of the form

What it is for it to be that  $x$  is human *and*  $y$  is equine is for it to be that  $\psi(x, y)$

(the italics emphasizes the plural as opposed to singular-and-conjunctive character of the *definiendum*) might hold by virtue of two real definitions of the forms

What it is for it to be that  $x$  is human is for it to be that  $\psi(x)$

What it is for it to be that  $x$  is equine is for it to be that  $\psi(x)$ .

For intuitively, what it is for a pair of entities to be such that one is a human and the other a horse just boils down to what it is, on the one hand, for something to be a human, and on the other, for something to be a horse.

However, we might think there can be *irreducibly (definiendum-)plural* real definitions, i.e., plural real definitions that do *not* hold by virtue of a plurality of singular ones. Examples might include something in the vicinity of one or more of these:

What it is for it to be that  $x$  is a pitcher *and*  $y$  is a catcher is for it to be that  $\psi(x, y)$

What it is for it to be that  $x$  is a lock *and*  $y$  is a key is for it to be that  $\psi(x, y)$

What it is for it to be that  $x$  is an  $x$ -axis *and*  $y$  is a  $y$ -axis *and*  $z$  is a  $z$ -axis is for it to be that  $\psi(x, y, z)$ .<sup>32</sup>

And, I want to suggest, there may be a plural real definition of the form

What it is for it to be that  $x$  is Castor *and*  $y$  is Pollux is for it to be that  $\psi(x, y)$

in which the *definiens* is qualitative. If there is, then inasmuch as there is no real definition of the form  $*_c$  or  $*_p$  in which the *definiens* is qualitative, we would have an irreducibly plural qualitative real definition of the spheres' identity properties.

The intuitive idea is that, though there is no qualitative *property* the having of which constitutes what it is to be Castor (Pollux), there may be a qualitative *relation* the instantiation of which by two entities constitutes what it is for them to be Castor and Pollux. If there is, I think it follows that the spheres' identity properties consist in qualitative matters.<sup>33</sup> Though the spheres would lack *individual* qualitative essences, the relevant relation would constitute what we might call a *collective* qualitative essence for the spheres.<sup>34</sup> For specificity, here is an example of what such a real definition might look like. Let " $F$ " be a monadic qualitative predicate satisfied both by Castor and by Pollux in Alef that captures their intrinsic qualitative character, and " $R$ " a dyadic qualitative predicate satisfied by Castor and Pollux that captures their extrinsic qualitative character. " $R$ " comprehends the spheres' spatial separation, as well as spatiotemporal totality facts to the effect that they are alone. Now consider:

<sup>32</sup>I owe the first two examples to Harold Hodes and Derk Pereboom respectively.

<sup>33</sup>This line of thought undermines, I think, Rosenkrantz's argument for haecceities from the "problem of individuation" (*Haecceity*, chap. 2), though I have not directly engaged his argument.

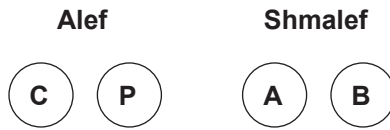
<sup>34</sup>Cf. Fine's notion of "simultaneous definition" ("Ontological Dependence," 282–284) or "relational essence" ("Senses of Essence," 65–66).



(\*\*) What it is for it to be that  $x$  is Castor *and*  $y$  is Pollux is for it to be that  $x$  is  $F$  &  $y$  is  $F$  &  $x$  and  $y$  are  $R$ .

Let  $Q$  be the relation constituting the *definiens*, that is, a relation a pair of entities stands in just in case, by definition, they are individually  $F$  and jointly  $R$ . If \*\* is true,  $Q$ 's instantiation by a pair of entities constitutes what it is for them to be Castor and Pollux.<sup>35</sup>

This brings us to Menzel's argument for the pervasive non-existence of qualitative essences for individuals. If sound, this would establish the possibility of a duplicate of Alef devoid of Castor and Pollux.



And were there such a possible world, \*\* would be false. For in this other world,  $Q$  would be instantiated by a pair of entities other than Castor and Pollux, in which case  $Q$ 's instantiation by a pair of entities would not be *sufficient* for their being Castor and Pollux. And the same would go for any qualitative relation. So, Menzel's argument challenges the existence, not only of individual qualitative essences for creatures, but of collective qualitative essences for them too.

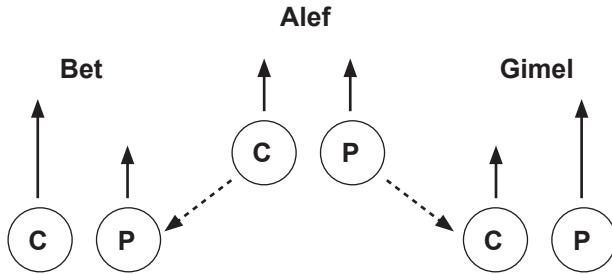
Since we are granting Alef's possibility, let us start with that world. In the first step of the argument, we infer the possibility of an expanded four-sphere world,  $v$ , containing Castor and Pollux. In the second step, we infer the possibility of a contracted two-sphere world,  $u$  (or Shmalef), containing  $v$ 's *other* two spheres. However, if we accept \*\*, we should reject the first step. Though there may well be a possible duplicate of  $v$ , there would be no possible duplicate in which two of the spheres are Castor and Pollux. For given \*\*, a pair of entities' standing in  $Q$  is necessary for their being Castor and Pollux, and  $Q$  is not instantiated in  $v$ . (Recall that  $Q$  comprehends totality facts to the effect that there are *only* two spheres.)<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>35</sup>I defend the coherence of this sort of irreducibly plural real definition at greater length, and in a different context, in my "On the Possibility of Symmetry-breaking Determination" (unpublished manuscript). It is important that we not take the relational predicate " $R$ " and the relation  $Q$  to be satisfied or instantiated by their relata in a certain "order." (Cf. Fine's notion of a "strictly symmetric" relation ["Neutral Relations," 17].) For just as no qualitative property is such that having it suffices for being Castor (Pollux), no "directed" qualitative relation is such that one entity's "bearing" it "to" another suffices for the *first's* being Castor (Pollux) and the *second* Pollux (Castor). The idea behind \*\* is that two entities' being individually  $F$  and jointly  $R$  full stop, not in any order, suffices for *one's* being Castor (Pollux) and the *other* Pollux (Castor).

<sup>36</sup>This way of responding to instances of Menzel's argument is perfectly general, whether individual or collective qualitative essences are in the cross-hairs: one can invoke qualitative necessary conditions for being a particular creature  $x$  (or, for a plurality of entities' being particular creatures  $x_1, x_2$ , etc.) to resist what I have called the "first step" in the argument. A referee claims that our ability to resist a Menzel-style attack on individual qualitative essences in this way "would severely restrict the implications of the falsity of PII and make the author's project less urgent." For "[i]f nearly every possible creature has a qualitative

I noted in §4 that Menzel’s argument uses PII’s falsity to attack antihæc-  
ceitism. There are other ways of doing this too. The following argument  
for hæc-ecitism can basically be found in Adams.<sup>37</sup> Recall that, in Alef,  
Castor and Pollux exist for five seconds. Let us expand Alef in the *temporal*  
dimension by supposing Castor exists for ten seconds instead of five, and  
let us expand Alef again by supposing Pollux does instead. Call these ex-  
panded worlds “Bet” and “Gimel.”



Bet and Gimel are distinct duplicates. So, if possibility is preserved through  
the expansions, they constitute a pair of possible distinct duplicates.

This is a powerful argument for hæc-ecitism. However, unlike Men-  
zel’s argument, its soundness would not undermine the view that Castor  
and Pollux have a collective qualitative essence. Alef and Shmalef would  
violate antihæc-ecitism by virtue of having disjoint domains of indi-  
viduals, whereas Bet and Gimel would violate antihæc-ecitism by virtue  
of distributing qualitative roles across a common domain of individuals  
differently. In the former case, the individuals in either world could not  
have a collective qualitative essence, since any candidate qualitative  
real *definiens* would be instantiated by different individuals in the other  
world. But in the latter case, there may be a candidate qualitative real  
*definiens* that is instantiated by the same individuals in both worlds. To be  
sure, if we take *Q*’s instantiation to imply that the relata exist for exactly  
five seconds, Bet’s and Gimel’s possibility would undermine \*\*. But we  
could modify the *definiens* by, for example, eliminating some specificity  
so as to render its instantiation consistent with a multiplicity of “possible

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individual essence, then God can just restrict his attention to those.” Now, I noted in §4 that there are kinds of generalism that differ as to the extent of generality in God’s knowledge, and one might indeed try to defend a rather minimal form, such as by maintaining that only PII-violating worlds contain individuals lacking individual qualitative essences. First, however, I think the notion of a collective qualitative essence is crucial for adequately motivating the view that possible creatures tend to have individual qualitative essences. For without this notion, it is natural to think that PII-violating worlds contain individuals with irreducibly non-qualitative identities. And given the natural thought that the identities of individuals in these worlds are not of a radically different sort than those of individuals in other worlds (e.g., consider a two-sphere world whose spheres slightly differ in size), it becomes natural to extrapolate to possible creatures generally. Second, if my argumentation in §6 is cogent, the notion of a collective qualitative essence salvages *singularism*.

<sup>37</sup>Adams, “Primitive Thisness and Primitive Identity,” 22–23. Cf., e.g., Kment, “Hæc-ecitism, Chance, and Counterfactuals.”

futures,” resulting in a collective qualitative essence that is instantiated in Alef, Bet, and Gimel.

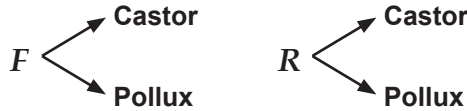
Let us take stock. I have argued that, though PII’s falsity implies the possible existence of individuals lacking qualitative essences, it does not imply the fundamentality of thisness, for the identity properties of the relevant individuals may yet consist in qualitative matters. And one way to see this, I have argued, is to see that a collection of individuals each of which lacks an individual qualitative essence may together have a *collective* qualitative essence. I have also explained how PII’s falsity might be taken to *indirectly* threaten the existence of collective qualitative essences, by being used to attack antihæcceitism. And I have argued that, on one way of doing so, collective qualitative essences can be used to resist the attack itself; and that, on another way, collective qualitative essences are not threatened.<sup>38</sup>

### 6. Theology

Suppose Castor and Pollux have some sort of collective qualitative essence, and let *R* be the relevant qualitative relation. And let *F* be a very specific qualitative property shared by Castor and Pollux in Alef. We saw earlier that a generalist might take *F* to constitute a proxy for Castor and Pollux. This instantiates the broader approach of taking proxies to be *properties* possibly had by that for which they proxy. But let us depart from this and take the *relation R* to constitute a proxy for both Castor and Pollux.

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<sup>38</sup>A referee identifies an apparent tension between Bet’s and Gimel’s possibility and the *non*-fundamentality of thisness. If Bet and Gimel are possible, it seems there are possibly non-qualitative propositions that do not consist in qualitative matters. In particular, since Bet and Gimel have identical qualitative truths but distinct non-qualitative ones, it seems that any non-qualitative proposition over which they differ (e.g., that Castor outlives Pollux) could not consist in qualitative truths. More generally, it seems hæcceitism implies thisness’s fundamentality. Now, I have not argued that thisness is not fundamental *per se*, but that its fundamentality is not implied by PII’s falsity. For there are PII-violating worlds (e.g., Alef) *all of whose* non-qualitative matters can be coherently taken to consist in qualitative ones. This is all we need to get the sort of collective qualitative essence on which my present defense of qualitative singularism’s consistency with PII’s falsity turns. However, there *are* potential objections to my argument (which there is no space to adequately explore here) that turn on the alleged deliverance of thisness’s fundamentality by “Adams-style” candidate counterexamples to antihæcceitism (e.g., the pair of Bet and Gimel) (cf. note 42). First, I have not granted the genuineness of any such candidate counterexamples *per se*, but rather admitted their *prima facie* intuitive power and argued that they do not threaten collective qualitative essences—unlike “Menzel-style” candidate counterexamples (e.g., the pair of Alef and Shmalef), which do. Second, though I am willing to grant that Bet’s and Gimel’s possibility would imply thisness’s fundamentality, given §4’s gloss of it, I do not think that their possibility would imply that “thisness” constitutes a “fundamental feature of reality” in a sense that threatens qualitative singularism. (In my “Qualitativism, Hæcceitism, and Time” [unpublished manuscript], I discuss this sort of threat to antihæcceitism, as well as what it would be for non-qualitative matters to be fundamental, at greater length.) Let me just point out here that, if Castor and Pollux have a collective qualitative essence, non-qualitative propositions over which Bet and Gimel differ (e.g., that Castor exists for ten seconds) will be “ultimately qualitative,” where a proposition *p* is ultimately qualitative if the identity property of any constituent of *p* by virtue of which *p* is non-qualitative (e.g., Castor) has a qualitative real definition.



In so doing, we follow the generalist in rejecting a one-to-one correspondence between proxies and creatures, but—I want to say—without embracing generalism. God’s acquaintance with *R* intuitively constitutes *singular* knowledge of Castor and of Pollux.

I suggested in §2 that whether some pre-creation knowledge constitutes general knowledge of a possible creature *x* can be understood in terms of whether that knowledge conflates *x* with any other possible creature *y*. And I said a *prima facie* intuitive way of making sense of whether this is so is in terms of whether *x* and *y* share a proxy. Now I want to refine this. If a proxy *P* for something *x* is a *property* possibly had by *x*, I think that, if *P* is also possibly had by something *y* that is not *x*, acquaintance with *P* constitutes general knowledge of *x*. However, if *P* is not a property possibly had by that for which it proxies, it is by no means clear that *P*’s proxying for multiple creatures suffices for the relevant knowledge’s being general. For example, if *P* is a *relation* constituting a collective qualitative essence, I think acquaintance with it constitutes singular knowledge of all the creatures that would instantiate it. In the case of a property proxy, a one-many relationship between it and creatures intuitively signifies a *lack of specificity* in the divine knowledge. But in the case of a relation proxy, a one-many relationship between it and creatures may be traced to the fact that the relevant creatures are *essentially connected*.

Suppose Matt has a qualitative essence, *G*. God’s acquaintance with *G* constitutes singular knowledge of Matt, and it seems to me that, by the same token, acquaintance with *R* constitutes singular knowledge of Castor and of Pollux. For just as *G* is such that its instantiation by something would suffice for that entity’s being a particular creature, namely Matt, *R* is such that its instantiation by two entities would suffice for those entities’ being a particular pair of creatures, namely Castor and Pollux. The point may be reinforced by juxtaposition. Suppose Alef and Shmalef *were* both possible, such that *R* failed to constitute a collective qualitative essence. In that case, God’s acquaintance with *R* would fail to constitute singular knowledge of any possible creatures, for it would intuitively conflate some, such as Alef’s spheres and Shmalef’s spheres.

It might be objected that, even if acquaintance with *R* does not conflate Alef’s spheres with any other pair of possible creatures, it still fails to constitute singular knowledge of any possible creatures, by virtue of conflating Castor and Pollux themselves. My initial reaction is simply to deny the charge. Again, contrast *R* with *F*: acquaintance with the latter *does* constitute general knowledge of Castor and of Pollux. And contrast the view that *R* is an essence with the view that it is not: on the latter view, acquaintance with *R* *would* constitute general knowledge of Castor and

of Pollux. However, it may help to consider some other objections that may be seen as constituting different ways of advancing this “conflation” claim.

It might be said: God’s acquaintance with *R* does not enable him to *distinguish* Castor and Pollux; so, acquaintance with *R* does not constitute singular knowledge of them. Call this *the direct objection*, since the premise directly posits a cognitive limitation. But what does the word “distinguish” mean in the premise? If we understand the ability to distinguish something *x* and *y* in terms of the ability to recognize that *x* and *y* would, were they to exist, be distinct as opposed to identical, two rather than one in number, then the premise is false: acquaintance with *R* does enable God to distinguish Castor and Pollux, for in grasping *R* he grasps sufficient conditions for the distinctness of the would-be relata, such as their would-be spatial separation. But suppose we understand the ability to distinguish something *x* and *y* in terms of the ability to grasp some “distinguishing mark” or “differentia” that *x* and *y* respectively essentially and impossibly exemplify (or vice versa). This will be a property that *x* and *y* respectively essentially and impossibly have (or vice versa).

Supposing Alef were actual, there would be no qualitative differentiae between Castor and Pollux, i.e., no qualitative property that Castor and Pollux respectively essentially and impossibly have (or vice versa). There would admittedly be non-qualitative differentiae between them, such as *being Castor* and *being Pollux*. However, none of these differentiae between them would be *deep*, where by a deep differentia between two entities I mean a differentia between them that does not consist in any matters that are not differentiae between them. These differentiae would not be deep, for their instantiation would consist in that of *R*. Now if there *are no* deep differentiae between Castor and Pollux *to be grasped*, and God *does* grasp that in which any differentiae between them consist, I think the direct objection fails. Perhaps the inference is bad: if there are no deep differentiae between two creatures to grasp, it may be that an inability to distinguish them does *not* imply a lack of singular knowledge. Or perhaps the premise is false: if God grasps that in which any differentiae between two creatures consists, perhaps he *can* distinguish them. Recall the basic idea behind a proxy account of knowledge: acquaintance with an existent entity (a proxy) constitutes knowledge of a non-existent entity (that which is proxied). Now it seems that if acquaintance with an essence constitutes knowledge of that which would have it, such acquaintance also constitutes knowledge of the identity property of that which would have that essence. For example, acquaintance with Matt’s qualitative essence *G* constitutes knowledge, not just of Matt, but also of *being Matt*. So perhaps acquaintance with *R* constitutes knowledge of *being Castor* and *being Pollux*, in which case God may grasp differentiae between Castor and Pollux. However we understand the direct objection’s flaw, the fact *that* it is flawed may be reinforced by juxtaposition. Consider a view on which *R* is not a collective essence, on which Castor’s and Pollux’s identity properties are

deep differentiae between them, and on which these properties do not exist prior to creation. Call this view “generalism\*.” On generalism\*, God is unable to distinguish Castor and Pollux prior to creation in a way that *does* compromise singular knowledge.

It might be said: God’s acquaintance with *R* does not enable him to *intentionally create* just Castor, or alternatively, just Pollux; so, acquaintance with *R* does not constitute singular knowledge of them. Call this *the indirect objection*, since the premise directly posits a limitation in power, which is intuitively supposed to signify a cognitive limitation. I grant the premise but deny the inference. Since *R* constitutes an irreducibly collective essence of Castor and Pollux, it is impossible for *just* one of these very spheres to exist. For just as anything has an individual essence essentially if at all, anything participates in an irreducibly collective essence essentially if at all.<sup>39</sup> To be sure, the idea that something is impossible does not, in and of itself, imply that God’s inability to bring it about does not constitute a lack of power—and hence does not imply that the inability does not signify a cognitive limitation. (For example, suppose something is impossible partly *because* God cannot bring it about.) However, since we are deriving collective essences from real definitions (cf. §5), the relevant impossibility is squarely rooted in the nature of Castor and Pollux,<sup>40</sup> and so the relevant inability does not signify a cognitive limitation. On generalism\*, by contrast, it *may* be possible for just Castor to exist, and yet God is unable to intentionally bring this about. (The most God could do would be to intentionally bring it about that such and such a kind of individual exists, which *could* turn out to be Castor.) On this view, God’s inability to intentionally create just Castor does signify a lack of singular knowledge.<sup>41</sup>

Let us take stock. I argued in §5 that, even if Alef is possible and PII false, it is coherent that the identity properties of Castor and Pollux would,

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<sup>39</sup>Suppose Matt and Fred respectively have qualitative essences *being G* and *being H*. If Matt can co-exist with Fred, we can ascribe them a collective qualitative essence with the sentence “what it is for it to be that *x* is Matt and *y* is Fred is for it to be that *x* is *G* & *y* is *H*.” But such an essence is not *irreducibly* collective. And if Matt can exist without Fred, it is not essential to Matt that it participates in this collective essence.

<sup>40</sup>See, e.g., Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* I, q. 25, art. 3.

<sup>41</sup>It might be said that, prior to creation, it is *not* possible that just Castor exists, because, prior to creation, there is no such proposition to be possibly true (see, e.g., Adams, “Actualism and Thisness,” 10). But this would not be to the point (see Menzel, “Temporal Actualism and Singular Foreknowledge,” 499–500). Singularists and generalists can agree that, prior to creation, there are no creature-involving propositions to be possibly true, but also that it is possible that such propositions come to exist and acquire truth. As far as possibility goes, what is relevant is whether it is possible that particular creature-involving propositions come to exist and acquire truth. As far as power goes, what is relevant is whether God can do things such that, were he to, the existence and truth of particular creature-involving propositions would necessarily result. If *R* is a collective essence, acquaintance with it enables God to do something, namely actualize its instantiation, such that, were he to, the existence and truth of the proposition that (e.g.) Castor exists would necessarily result. It is in this sense that, prior to creation, God can intentionally actualize the proposition that Castor exists, or intentionally create Castor. On generalism\*, by contrast, God cannot intentionally create Castor (*a fortiori*, just Castor) in this sense.



were they to exist, consist in qualitative matters, and I argued that one way of making sense of this is through the idea that the spheres, though lacking qualitative individual essences, would participate in a qualitative collective essence. In this section, I have defended the conditional claim that, if the spheres would indeed participate in such an essence, God's pre-creation acquaintance with it would constitute singular knowledge of them. If I am right, PII's falsity is consistent with qualitative singularism. Though debate about the conditional claim could no doubt continue,<sup>42</sup> space is limited, and I think enough has been said to establish, at a minimum, its *prima facie* plausibility. I want to suggest that any intuitive resistance to the conditional ultimately boils down either to resistance to the antecedent or to a failure to adequately appreciate its significance (or both). For intuitively, if the spheres' identity properties would indeed *consist* in qualitative matters, acquaintance with some such matters *ought* to suffice for singular knowledge of the spheres. And to be sure, my aim in these two sections has not been to argue that the spheres' identity properties would in fact consist in qualitative matters, but to argue for the coherence of the view that they would (in §5) and to make the connection with pre-creation divine knowledge (in this section).

### 7. Conclusion

I have been working with an account of pre-creation divine knowledge of possible creatures on which such knowledge consists in God's being acquainted with proxies or "stand-ins" for creatures, and I have distinguished three theories, namely non-qualitative singularism, qualitative singularism, and qualitative generalism, which differ in terms of whether the proxies are qualitative or non-qualitative, and in terms of whether acquaintance with them constitutes singular or merely general knowledge of creatures. In §3, I raised a problem for non-qualitative singularism concerning the pre-creation "availability" of the alleged proxies. In §4, I raised a problem for qualitative singularism concerning the apparent falsity of a particular version of the Principle of the Identity of Indiscernibles, and explained how the problem might seem to motivate qualitative generalism. In §5 and §6, I argued that qualitative singularism is consistent with the relevant principle's falsity. The argument turned on two claims: the principle's falsity does not rule out the view that the identity properties of the relevant individuals would consist in qualitative matters; and a creature's proxy need not be a property possibly had by it.

Though I think these considerations go some way toward enhancing the plausibility of qualitative singularism relative to its competitors, my

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<sup>42</sup>In particular, it would be fruitful to consider revised versions of the direct and indirect objections in which the premises are revised so as to involve, not Castor and Pollux *per se*, but particular Castor- and Pollux-involving states of affairs (such as Bet and Gimel—see §5). I also think it would be fruitful to consider objections that turn on distinctively Molinist ideas (thanks to a referee here), or more generally, to explore the relationship between Molinism and qualitative singularism *sans* PII.



main purpose has not been to argue for qualitative singularism *per se*, but to free it from some alleged metaphysical commitments that (in my view) have dragged it down. Qualitative singularism stands apart from qualitative generalism and non-qualitative singularism in maintaining a firm commitment to the metaphysically *derivative* nature of non-qualitative aspects of reality; the latter two theories mainly diverge over whether allegedly fundamental non-qualitative matters are divinely graspable prior to creation. As such, a full-orbed case for qualitative singularism would involve a positive case for the exclusive fundamentality of qualitative matters. However, though I have not made that case here, in arguing that such a view does not depend on the relevant version of the identity of indiscernibles (in §5), I have tried to disarm a major objection to it.<sup>43</sup>

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