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ON DYING¹

C. J. F. WILLIAMS

THE FIRST solid bit of argumentation you get in Plato's *Phaedo* goes something like this: Whatever comes to be, comes to be from its opposite (cf. 70e, sqq.). If at a certain time t a given thing a begins to be F , before that time t it must have been non- F . Wherever a pair of predicates, F and G , are genuine contradictories; where, that is, they stand to each other in the same relation as F stands in to non- F ; it is necessarily true that if a began to be F at t before then a was G . The only trouble comes from the difficulty of finding substitutes for F and G that people will allow to be genuine contradictories. If butter began to be soft at four o'clock, we may suggest, before four it was hard. A tiresome opponent will retort that there is a state in which butter cannot properly be called either hard or soft. We try again: If Ann began to be asleep at eight, before eight she was awake; if my shirt became dirty on Tuesday, before Tuesday it was clean; if Bonzo died last week, before last week he was alive. And when the advocate of the borderline state reminds us of the various twilight areas of consciousness or cleanliness, we are reduced to legislation: "asleep" shall henceforth apply to every mental state short of complete wakefulness, "alive" to every condition of the body before the onset of putrefaction, "clean" to every shirt incapable of producing a certain measurable discoloration in the water in which it is washed. "Let F and G be contradictories", we still guardedly maintain: "then if a comes to be F at time t , before time t a was G ".

This generalization is the major premiss of Plato's argument. It is I think, a logically true generalization (if, that is, it can be allowed that there is such a thing as a logic of time relations). Plato possibly, and his commentators certainly, have confused it with a very general hypothesis about the world's being in a state of flux—a hypothesis which is attributed to Heraclitus. We could formulate the Heraclitan doctrine thus:

- (1) If F and G are contradictories, then if anything at a given time is F before that time it was G .

Instances of this very general law would be: "Whatever is dirty was previously clean"; "Whatever is hot was previously cold"; "Whatever is asleep was previously awake"; "Whatever is dead was previously alive". Some of these instances may be true; but it is an empirical fact that some possible instances are false. Not every loud noise first existed as a soft noise and then became loud. Accordingly this formula, so far from being a logical truth, is an empirical falsehood. Plato and even Heraclitus may have confused the two: the distinction between logical and empirical generalizations was only beginning to be made then. There is less excuse for the confusion in Plato's modern commentators. The best excuse that can be found for them is given by drawing attention to the fact that the difference between the two formulae can be narrowed to a single

word: (1), the Heraclitan formula, can be turned from an empirical falsehood to a logical truth by the single substitution of the word "becomes" for the word "is". This gives us:

(2) If F and G are contradictories, then if anything at a given time becomes F before that time it was G ,
which is what I have called Plato's major premiss. It is only when this substitution is made that we get a formula of interest to philosophers.

Plato may have confused the doctrines expressed by these formulae because in the particular instance which interested him the distinction between logical and empirical generalization cannot be made. "Whatever *is* dead at a given time must previously have been alive" is a logical truth just as much as "Whatever *becomes* dead at a given time must previously have been alive": the reason is that it is also a logical truth that whatever is dead has at some time become dead, i.e. died. Even the still-born child was once a living embryo: it was born dead only because it died before it was born: and this is true whatever one believes about the *sort* of life the embryo possessed.

Plato regards "living" and "dead" as just another pair of opposites: he neatly introduces them with the help of the analogous pair, "awake" and "asleep". If however they are opposites it must be true not only that whatever begins to be dead must previously have been alive, but that what begins to be alive must previously have been dead. What begins to be clean must previously have been dirty just as much as *vice versa*. If "living" and "dead" are genuine contradictories there seems to be no escape from this conclusion. The living must come from the dead just as necessarily as the dead come from the living. The doctrine of metempsychosis is apparently demonstrable as a particular instance of a general truth of logic.

A first line of resistance to this paradoxical consequence might be to contest the view that "living" and "dead" are contradictories: perhaps they are only contraries. If "living" means "existing" and "dead" "no longer existing" it might appear that there is a *tertium quid*, "not yet existing". But is this really a third possibility? If I ask whether your car is black or white you may answer "Neither; it's blue". But if I ask, tactlessly, whether your husband is alive or dead you cannot answer, "Neither; he doesn't yet exist". Perhaps you might facetiously use this locution to convey the fact that you are not yet married. In that case let me make my point by asking you whether your *father* is alive or dead. I can think of no way of attaching sense to the words "My father does not yet exist". To ask whether a person is alive or dead is not, like asking whether a thing is black or white, to make the possibly unjustified assumption that the alternatives exhaust all the possibilities. The suggestion that Plato has mistaken contraries for contradictories is a failure. The sophism is as yet undiagnosed.

Let us have another look at the supposedly untenable conclusion of his argument. "Whatever begins at a certain time to be alive must before that time have been dead." Suppose it were possible that a certain quantity of inanimate matter should at a certain time have stirred to life. We can certainly picture something which looks as if it were describable in this way. Here is something which at a certain time began to be alive: before that time should we not say that it was dead? Instead of speaking of a "quantity of inanimate matter" could I not have spoken of a "quantity of *dead* matter"? (On this interpretation, of course, it does not remain true that whatever is dead must have died.) "Alive" and "dead" are synonymous, it might be urged, with "animate" and "inanimate"; and there cannot be any doubt, surely, that *these* are contradictories? Plato has merely pointed to a substitution-instance of the logically true formula, namely, "If *a* begins to be animate at time *t*, before time *t* *a* was inanimate". What is there in this to cause dismay?

There are, I think, two things; one is more likely to cause trouble to an Aristotelian, the other to a Platonist. First then the Aristotelian may object that, whatever the empirical facts, there are conceptual difficulties about the claim that a given quantity of matter passed from an inanimate to an animate state. In order to isolate the conceptual from the empirical difficulties it will be helpful to consider the opposite claim, which shares the conceptual but not the empirical difficulties, namely the claim that a given quantity of matter passed from an animate to an inanimate state. For here we do not need to picture anything in the mind's eye, nor need we concern ourselves with the question whether what is claimed to have happened is empirically possible. If the claim is in order conceptually the sort of fact it purports to state is one which we have endless opportunities of observing. Let us suppose that we witness a pheasant's being shot dead. Here we have a mass of feathers, a pair of feet, a beak, etc., which a moment ago were moving upwards through the air, lungs filling regularly with air, blood circulating smoothly. Now this mass of flesh, blood, feathers and bones is plummeting to earth to lie there still, shattered and bleeding until the retriever gets hold of it. Have I not described a change which comes over a continuing object, something which I referred to first as "a mass" and then again as "this mass"? Is not the change correctly and compendiously described as a change from the animate to the inanimate state?

The objection to describing it in this way comes from the difficulty in conceiving the mass of feathers, etc., as a continuing object. A continuing object is an object capable of reidentification, and different kinds of objects are reidentified with the help of different kinds of criteria. An object like a key, for example, is reidentified as satisfying the criteria for being roughly the same bit of metal having roughly the same shape. It could be slightly bent and thus change its shape to a certain extent without changing its identity; but if its metal were melted down and reshaped to fit an entirely

different lock it could not, I think, justifiably be called the same key. It might snap in two and be joined together again with the help of some new metal without changing its identity; but if more than half the metal, or at least more than half of the part that actually fits into the lock, were replaced, we should, I think, deny that it was still the same key.

With the live pheasant it is different. The pheasant does not have to preserve its shape, or even the range of shapes available to so mobile an object, throughout its life history. As a chicken it looked very different in shape from how it looked as a mature bird. But more importantly the stuff of which it is made, the atoms, if you like, which enter into its composition at any given time, can change many times in the course of its life history without introducing doubt as to its continued identity. It is not unlike a river which continues the same river though continually changing the water of which it is composed. One does not have to be an expert biologist to recognize that the pheasant's identity is more like that of the river than that of the key. The intake of food and excretion of waste from a living body is obvious to common sense and is allowed for in common sense ideas of bodily continuity. Aristotle was no adherent of atomic theories, but he was so impressed by the difference between the criteria of identity for animate and inanimate objects, that he would not allow that "animal" applied unambiguously to a living body and to a corpse (412b21).

This then is the difficulty about describing death as change. There turns out to be nothing which can be said to change. That which was a living pheasant is not the same thing as what is now a pitiable corpse. Or if it is, it is Aristotelian matter, the problematic *hypokeimenon*—underlying support—of substantial change. But this, which in itself is indescribable, *nec quid, nec quale, nec quantum*, is not the mass of feathers etc., previously described at some length, which seemed to pass from an animate to an inanimate state.

That then is a difficulty which Aristotelians have found in the notion of something which was animate becoming inanimate; and no doubt they would find a symmetrical difficulty in the notion of something which was inanimate becoming animate, in this interpretation of what it is for the living to come from the dead. But there is another difficulty which would face not Aristotelians so much as Platonists: Plato himself had something quite different in mind when he suggested his paradox that whatever began at a certain time to be alive must previously have been dead. In taking the sting out of this paradox by interpreting "began to be alive" as "began to be animate" (if Aristotelians will allow that the sting has in truth *been* taken out), we have entirely frustrated Plato's purpose. The beginning of life which he had in mind was the event which Christians regard as the beginning of existence for each individual. Plato tends to refer to this event as birth; but no great harm is done to his argument by taking it as conception, or whenever the ensouled body is on the Christian view held

to come into existence. The beginning of life and the beginning of existence are easily thought of as being the same. "I wasn't alive then" is a more natural way for me to reply to a request to recount what it felt like to live through the General Strike than "I didn't exist at the time". But the less natural expression would state the same fact. The Aristotelian tag *vivere viventibus est esse* (415b13) makes the same point. Plato's paradox consists precisely in making us reject this identification of *life* and *existence* by treating the question "What were you before you became alive?" as on a par with "What were you before you became an M.P.?" There is no obvious bit of matter to qualify as what a living body was before it became alive, even if such a description were conceptually sound. Since Plato insists on his question he is able easily to foist on us the answer that what I was before I became alive was a disembodied soul. Becoming alive, if not animation, must be embodiment.

We are inclined today, however, to insist on Plato's facing the suggestion that the beginning of life is the beginning of existence. He cannot, at any rate, be allowed to assume that it is not and go on to deny on these grounds that the end of life is the end of existence. And if the beginning of life is the beginning of existence, is not the mistake behind the question "What were you before you began to be alive?" the old mistake of treating existence as a predicate? The only thing that could characterize me before I began to exist is non-existence; but how could non-existence characterize anything? Anything so characterizable could not exist to have a character. The trouble comes not so much from treating existence as a predicate as from treating that whose existence is in question as a subject. Given that Plato's major premiss was (2), he needs in order to reach his conclusion the minor premiss: "'Alive' and 'dead' are contradictories". But only predicates can be contradictory terms; for contradictory terms are defined by reference to predication in contradictory propositions, namely, as those terms which when predicated of the same thing at the same time produce contradictory propositions. If "alive" in any of its senses means the same as "existent" for a certain range of subjects, it cannot in that sense be a predicate, and so cannot be the contradictory of anything.² It is tempting to see this as the point at which Plato's argument breaks down.

Shall we say, then, that Plato's argument does not apply if the beginning of life is understood as the beginning of existence and the end of life, i.e. death, as the end of existence? His argument is designed to prove that death is not the end of existence, but it will work only if we begin by assuming that to die is not to cease to exist; for if "dying" can be interpreted as "ceasing to exist" there is a sense in which "dead" and "alive" are not contradictories, since they are not predicates. So his argument only gets off the ground if it assumes what it sets out to prove: *petitio principii*, in fact.

To take this view is to maintain that any sense of the verb "be" in which

it is synonymous with “exist” is non-predicative. It is to concede that Russell and the consensus of modern philosophical opinion are right in supposing that the only sense of “exist” is that in which it does the same job as is done by the existential quantifier, that the analysis of “An F exists” as “For some value of x the propositional function ‘ x is F ’ is true” exhausts the possibilities of analysing the concept of *existence*.

This doctrine has been contested by Professor Geach;³ and the context in which he questions most persuasively the correctness of the doctrine is precisely that in which “exist” is governed by the quasi-auxiliaries “begin”, “cease” and “continue”. Geach’s view, as I understand it, would be that, whereas in “Kindly bank-managers exist” it would be wrong for the logician to class the verb “exist” as a predicate, in “The G.W.R. ceased to exist in 1947” it would be right for him to class it as a “predicable”, to follow his convenient redeployment of a technical term.⁴ The distinction follows from the character of the argument used to show that “exist” in propositions like “Kindly bank-managers exist” is not a predicate. This argument begins by calling attention to the paradox of non-existence at which I have already glanced in this paper: “Kindly bank-managers do not exist” cannot be analysed as predicating non-existence of kindly bank-managers. For such an analysis to work there would have to be kindly bank-managers for us to predicate non-existence of. This would mean we could show by mere analysis of the proposition, without entering a single Manager’s Parlour, that the proposition was false, since it could not be true unless it was false. Since *non-existence* is not a predicate *existence* cannot be either. I shall not try to defend this part of the argument now, but shall assume its success; for it is the earlier part, that which deals with the paradox of non-existence, which looks at first sight inapplicable to propositions like “The G.W.R. ceased to exist in 1947”.

A proposition which asserts non-existence of something seems to assert that there is nothing about which it can be asserting anything. A proposition which asserts of something that it has ceased to exist has something about which its assertion can be made: something, namely, which once existed. There is no difficulty about asserting something of what no longer exists but once did. Some people, as Wittgenstein thought⁵ and as Geach reminds us,⁶ may have objected to saying that Mr. N. N. is dead on the grounds that a proper name can only name what still exists to be named. Now I do not want to take up this position, but I should like to examine a slightly different one. This is the view that, although one can predicate something of what no longer exists, what one predicates of it cannot itself exist, so to speak, outside the time limits set by the period of existence of the subject of predication.⁷ For example, while there is no difficulty about my now, in 1967, predicating of the G.W.R. that its labour relations were bad in the nineteen-thirties, it would be very odd, given that the G.W.R. ceased to exist in 1947, for me to predicate of it that its labour relations were good in the nineteen-fifties. Again if my Scottish terrier

died in 1961 I could hardly say of him that he had distemper in 1963; nor of course, if he was born in the year the G.W.R. ceased to exist, could he have had distemper during the War.

In *Three Philosophers* Miss Anscombe wrote: "Still more recently" (she had been talking about Russell and Prichard) "I have heard a similar difficulty raised how some predicate can be going to hold of a subject at a time when the subject perhaps will not exist; as if a man could not be going to be famous when he was dead. Is there not something primitive about the conceptions displayed in each of these cases"? The difficulty to which Miss Anscombe refers seems to be precisely the one to which I was drawing attention in the last paragraph. But her argument about posthumous fame is not enough to convince me that this conception is primitive or childish. A number of similar counter-examples suggest themselves:

- (A) "Hegel was much admired by English philosophers in the eight-
een-seventies."
- (B) "Her youthful good looks were still remembered when she had
become a gross and repellent old hag."
- (C) "The architects of the German Rococo period exercised a fascin-
ation over the generation whose taste was formed by Pevsner."
- (D) "Louis XV by his refusal to concern himself with anything besides
his own pleasures was responsible for the collapse of the French
system of government under his successor".

The first three of these examples contain predicates which philosophers today class as "intentional": "was admired . . ." "were remembered . . .", "exercised a fascination . . .". All these speak of a mental attitude on the part of people living at the time when predicate is said to hold. The objects of which the predicates are said to hold are in each case the objects of these mental attitudes. That mental attitudes should have objects which have ceased to exist before the attitudes are taken up is no more remarkable than that we should be able to name people who died before we name them. It has been remarked of some intentional predicates that they can take as their subject terms expressions which denote nothing at all without prejudice to the truth of the propositions thus formed: Ted can be afraid of the bogey man although there is no bogey man to be afraid of; you can go on looking for a letter that has long ago been destroyed. In so far as any of the alleged counter-examples, (A)—(D), involve intentional predicates they can be admitted without damage to the thesis. The thesis is, if you like, that to predicate something of an object is to presuppose the existence of the object at the time at which the predicate is said to hold of the object. It could be seen as the elaboration of a more general thesis that in predicating something of an object we presuppose the existence of that object. That the subjects of intentional predicates are not bound by the rule given in the more specific thesis is something which might have been inferred from the fact that intentional

objects are not bound by the rule given in the more general thesis. If we make an exception to the special rule in the case of intentional objects we are not legislating *ad hoc* to save our special thesis: the exception was implicit in the relation in which intentional objects already stood to the general thesis.

What I have called "the special thesis" is open to misunderstanding in one way at least which may be forestalled by more careful expression. To say that we presuppose the existence of an object "at the time at which the predicate is said to hold of it" might be interpreted as meaning that if at any time t I predicate " F " of x I presuppose that x exists at t . The time in question would then be the time at which I do the predicating, not the time at which x does the F 'ing. This of course is the thesis that I cannot say anything of Mr. N. N. after he is dead, which I have explicitly disavowed. Nevertheless the thesis I am maintaining can be expressed in a way that leaves no room for such an interpretation, namely:

- (3) If of any object it is said that at any time t it is, was or will be F , it is presupposed that at time t it exists, existed or will exist.

This then is "the special thesis" which (A)—(D) appear to disprove.

I said just now that the first three of these alleged counter-examples all involve intentional predicates. The third, (C), contains the predicate "exercised a fascination", and this while sharing the intentionality of "was admired" and "were remembered" seems also to have something in common with the predicate contained in the fourth example, (D), namely "was responsible". This last predicate, however, has nothing intentional about it, so intentionality cannot be the common feature shared by "exercised a fascination" and "was responsible". This feature I would more readily describe as "causal". Causal predicates seem capable of holding of their subjects after their subjects have ceased to exist, though not, of course, before they have come into existence.⁸ There is nothing odd about the conjunction, "He's gone: but he will leave his mark on our group". Where there is action there can sometimes be delayed action.

Here again we seem to have an exception to what I have called the special rule. If I am to preserve the rule I must justify the exception on broader grounds. Again I think this can be done. A causal proposition can often, I do not say always, be exhibited as explicable, that is to say, one which can be unpacked into more than one proposition. Thus, if I say that Tommy's mother kissed the pain away I am saying that she kissed Tommy and that the pain went away and that her kissing Tommy caused the pain to go away. Now I can ask when she kissed Tommy and when the pain went away: these events may be simultaneous or they may not. But the causal relation, which is explicitly stated only in the proposition "Her kissing Tommy caused the pain to go away", is not itself capable of being assigned a time in the way that times are assigned to the events which it relates. When the events are simultaneous we tend to forget this and think of the relation as existing at the time when the events occur; but

when the events are separated in time a pseudo-problem can force itself on us: If A caused B, and A happened on Monday while B happened on Saturday, when was it that A's causing B to happen occurred? Was it on Monday or Saturday, or was it going on during the whole week?

An answer to the question might be got by supposing that A occurred in the past and that B will occur in the future: how then will we tense the verb "cause"? The answer can only be "In the future tense". We cannot in these circumstances say "A caused B" but only "A will cause B". This I take to be what is represented by the Aristotelian adage, *Actio agentis est in patienti* (202a13, sqq.). But I cannot allow that this justifies us in saying that the causal relation is somehow situated in the future rather than in the past. The relation itself is atemporal, but the verb which signifies it has got to be tensed; grammatically we seem to have no tenseless verbs. The fact that it is the future tense that is used seems to me at the moment—though I feel very little confidence about this—to be a matter of convention.

Suppose that on her deathbed Tommy's mother commands him never to omit to say his prayers. And suppose that all through the rest of his life Tommy is obedient to this command. To say that Tommy will always obey his dead mother's command is to say that his mother will be obeyed in this respect throughout the rest of Tommy's life. Now it is true that Tommy's mother will in some sense survive death; but this truth is not, I think, entailed by the proposition that she will be obeyed after her death. To be obeyed is to have commanded and for the fact that one has commanded to cause what one commanded to be done. The doing may be in the future, and since *actio agentis est in patienti* we say that the mother *will be* obeyed. But the commanding took place before she died, and the causal relation between the commanding and the doing is not something to which in logic we need assign a time, although in grammar the verb which expresses it must have a tense. Louis XV was responsible for the breakdown under his grandson. He was responsible in virtue of what he did and what he left undone, and the predicates which ascribe these omissions and commissions to him held of him only while he was alive; what he was responsible for took place only after he was dead—*après moi le déluge*; the responsibility is not something to which we need assign a time. If Louis had said "I will be responsible for that flood" his use of the future tense would have been a mere *façon de parler*. He would not have been saying that his responsibility was to begin only when the events for which he was responsible began, namely, after his death.

Let us examine an analogous case: Temporal relations, like casual relations, are in themselves atemporal, although the events or states which they relate to each other are in time. My contention that the future tense of a causal verb is a mere matter of convention, not implying that the causal relation is itself somehow situated in the future, is thus supported by a similar phenomenon in the case of temporal relations. If I

say, "Last winter, with all that snow, will surely be followed by a hot summer" I am not assigning a time to the relation of temporal priority which I am asserting. If we divide the year into two seasons only and think of summer as following immediately on winter, we must envisage the moment when summer followed winter as the moment when winter ended and summer began. But we need not think like this. We can regard spring as occupying an intervening period, and can suppose that it is during such a period that the remark about a hot summer following the cold winter is made. There is no good reason to hold that the following is going to take place at the moment when summer begins rather than that it took place at the moment when winter ended or that it has been, is, and will be, going on right through the spring. In fact all these views would be mistaken. The winter is over, the summer has yet to come: to say they are temporarily related in this way is involved in situating them thus in time: there is no need to find a further temporal situation for the relation itself. Nevertheless, we say that the winter *will be* followed by the summer; we cannot say that it *was followed* without implying that what followed it is itself a thing of the past; we do not seem to be able to use the converse of *follow*, namely *precede*, at all in this context. The reason for this preference for the future tense is not clear to me at present. I have called it, as I called the similar preference in the manner of expressing causal relationships, a matter of convention. This was probably rash. I should not be surprised to be given a deeply significant, or even a trivial, explanation of the phenomenon. But what I *am* convinced of is that this mode of expression in no way implies that the temporal relation between winter and summer in this case is something *which is yet to come*; nor will I allow that the causal relationship between Louis XV's actions and omissions and the disasters of his grandson's reign itself obtained when the sixteenth rather than the fifteenth Louis was King of France.

What relevance has all this to my topic? It was urged against (3), the thesis Miss Anscombe regards as "primitive", that we could say of Louis XV that something became true of him after his death, namely that his behaviour brought about the collapse of monarchical rule in France. My answer to the objection is that the predicates describing his behaviour held of him during his lifetime, that the actual description of the collapse need not refer to him at all, and that the causal relation between his behaviour and the collapse is not something that has to have, or can have, a time assigned to it.

Supposing, however, that I may be allowed to have defended (3) successfully against this and other objections, what is the relevance of this thesis to the concept of *ceasing to exist*? It is this. The statement that someone ceased to do something is itself an explicable statement. "Jones ceased playing golf at sixty-eight" could be expanded into "Jones played golf up to the time when he was sixty-eight, but after he was sixty-eight he did not play golf". Similarly "The G.W.R. ceased to exist in 1947" could be

expanded into “The G.W.R. existed up to 1947, but after 1947 it did not exist”. Now *if* non-existence in this context is to be construed as a predicate, we have here another apparent counter-example to (3). We are assuming, however, that (3) has been successfully maintained. If we say that after 1947 the G.W.R. did not exist we should, on this view, be presupposing the existence of the G.W.R. after 1947. But this would be absurd. So either (3) is false, or, in saying that the G.W.R. did not exist after 1947 we are not predicating non-existence of it. And if we are not predicating non-existence of it when we say that after 1947 it did not exist, we cannot be predicating existence of it when we say that before 1947 it did; nor can “exist” in “cease to exist” occur as a predicable. If (3) then is allowed to be true our diagnosis of Plato’s sophism was correct, and Geach and Aquinas (for this is whom Geach claims to be following on this issue) were wrong in distinguishing a sense of “exist” in which it does occur as a predicate.

A single argument is small ammunition with which to attempt a refutation of such opponents as Aquinas and Geach. Luckily I have in my locker a further argument. It is this: The proposition “Black Beauty ceased to exist” seems to imply or presuppose the proposition “Black Beauty at one time existed”, just as “Henry stopped beating his wife” implies or presupposes “Henry at one time beat his wife”. If “exist” and “beat his wife” are predicates, or at least predicables, in the propositions which do the implying or presupposing they must surely be predicates in the propositions implied or presupposed. If “exist” in “Black Beauty ceased to exist” has what Geach calls the “present actuality” sense, it must have this sense in “Black Beauty at one time existed”. Where a proposition asserts that a subject has stopped doing something it implies or presupposes that it once did *that very thing*. If, however, “exists” is a predicate in “Black Beauty at one time existed” it must be a predicate in the contradictory of this, namely, “Black Beauty never existed”. Here, however, the paradox of non-existence reasserts itself, despite Geach’s contention that statements of this kind can raise no paradoxes of reference (cf. *Arist. Soc. Proc.* 1954-5, p. 267). How can “never existed” be a predicate, say something about something? If it were interpreted on these lines it would be impossible to ask the question “Did Black Beauty ever exist?” without presupposing an affirmative answer. It seems a *reductio ad absurdum*.

(Since this article was submitted for publication I have had an indication from Professor Geach of how he would answer the argument of this paragraph. Taking as his examples “Socrates has never existed” and “Socrates at some time has existed”, he writes: “the latter is necessarily true-if-it-says-anything, but it is only contingently the case that by uttering this sentence we succeed in saying anything. If Socrates had never come to be, we could not have set up the use of ‘Socrates’ that we have: just as nobody *was* able to use the name that way before Socrates *did* come to be. But it

is (in Arthur Prior's terminology) now-unalterably-the-case that Socrates did exist and that the name 'Socrates' did come to be used of him. To quote Prior again: Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent; but it doesn't follow that whereof one could not have spoken yesterday, thereof one must be silent today. It might never have been the case that 'Socrates has existed' is true; but it never could have been the case that 'Socrates has existed' was false; and before Socrates did exist, '*Gegonen ho Socrates*' with the proper name used as we now use 'Socrates', was unsayable. All this depends on the view that you can't name the not-yet-existent: you can have a name (ready) *for* it, but not a name *of* it. If one denied this, then indeed there might be difficulties about 'Socrates never has existed and never will exist': but that is surely a good reason *not* to deny it!"

I have considerable doubts about the relevance to my thesis of Mr. Prior's distinction between those propositions which are always and those which are sometimes not statable. Some of these doubts I have expressed in "Prior on Time" in *Ratio* XI, 2. There is no space here to embark on a full discussion of this topic: suffice it to say that it seems to me unlikely that the difficulties attendant on "Socrates has come into existence" are to be resolved by appeal to the fact that this proposition passed at a given date in the Fifth Century B.C. from being unstatable to being statable. Surely the notion of the proposition's becoming statable is intelligible only in the light of the prior notion of Socrates' coming into existence?

Nevertheless, it is clear that Geach would not be dismayed by the conclusion that when "exist" is understood in the "present actuality" sense "Black Beauty never existed" is incapable of expressing a true proposition. The paradox would for him be at best an apparent one which derived its plausibility from the fact that "Black Beauty never existed" could be understood in a different sense, a sense in which what it expresses is obviously true. My second argument against Aquinas and Geach, therefore, would need to be developed at far greater length if it was to have the slightest hope of success.)

If, then, "never existed" cannot be interpreted as a real predicate, neither can "at one time existed", nor can "exist" in "ceased to exist" be a predicable. What is true of "ceased to exist" will be equally true of "began to exist", "came into existence". We shall therefore be justified in locating the fallacy in Plato's argument at the point indicated above: in so far as "began to be alive" is capable of taking the sense "came into existence" it is not capable of featuring in an instance of (2), the logical generalization Plato discovered. "If *a* began to be alive at time *t*, previously *a* was dead" is not derivable from (2), if "alive" and "dead" have the sense "existent" and "non-existent". For in this sense they cannot be regarded as predicates and only predicates can be contradictories.

The question now arises, how *are* we to construe propositions like "Black Beauty ceased to exist". Is the existential quantifier, the "There

is" sense of "exist", available for this analysis? Could we try with "For some time before time t there was a horse which was F, G, H , etc., and was called 'Black Beauty' but after time t there was no such horse"? No; this will not do. It gives a sufficient but not a necessary condition for Black Beauty's having ceased to exist. It might be the case that after time t there was a horse which was F, G, H , etc., and was called 'Black Beauty', but that it was another horse. Its existence would in no way falsify the proposition that Black Beauty ceased to exist. Can we then build the identity requirement into our statement of the necessary and sufficient conditions of Black Beauty's ceasing to exist? Can we say "For some time before time t there was a horse which was F, G, H , etc., and was called 'Black Beauty' but after time t there was no horse which was F, G, H , etc., and was called 'Black Beauty' and was identical with the horse which was F, G, H , etc., and was called 'Black Beauty' and existed before time t "? This raises two difficulties: in using the words "existed before time t " it seems to reintroduce the very sense of existence which we were hoping to exorcise with the help of the "There is" sense of exist; and I do not see how "There is" can be made to do the work done by "exist" in "existed before time t " when this is preceded by the phrase "the horse which". The second difficulty lies in conjoining a phrase which begins "identical with . . ." to a string of phrases which express predicables, " F, G, H , and called 'Black Beauty' ". For, to use Frege's example and terminology, when we say that the Evening Star is bright we are saying something about the reference of the expression "the Evening Star", but when we say "The Evening Star is the same as the Morning Star" we are saying something about its sense. The attempt to pick out one thing which is bright and is the same as the Morning Star must accordingly rest on a misunderstanding; and more generally, any phrase of the form "which is F, G, H , and identical with . . ." will be a solecism. The attempt to build the identity requirement into the conjunction of predicables governed by "There was a horse which" and "There was no horse which" must inevitably, therefore, be a failure.

I am left, it seems, in a thoroughly uncomfortable if not ludicrous position. My arguments are supposed to have shown that no sense can be made of the notion of *ceasing to exist* whether "exist" is taken in the alleged predicative sense or is held to be analysable in terms of "There is an x which . . .". I have no further ideas how sense might be made of it. Does it follow that ceasing to exist is an impossibility, that there is no such thing as dying, that death is strictly unthinkable? I would not, of course, be the first philosopher to have held such a view. The ancient Atomists are chided by Aristotle (315b20, sqq.) for maintaining that *genesis* and *phthora* (coming-to-be and passing-away) are nothing else but *syncretis* and *diacrisis* (association and dissociation). Kant seems to have held that eternal, deathless substances were a necessary presupposition of scientific thought. But ordinary people do not think like this. The

concept of *dying* is one which quite young children are able to manipulate. It is no doubt in order as it stands. But how does it stand? How *do* ordinary people think about death? I do not mean, What do ordinary people *believe* about it, Which of a number of equally thinkable propositions do they hold to be true? I mean, What is the thought they think when they use the verb *to die*? These are questions to which I do not begin to know the answer.

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¹An earlier draft of this paper was read at the Spode conference at Somerville College, Oxford, in September, 1967.

²Pace Geach, who on p.267 of *Proc. Arist. Soc.* 1954-5 says, " 'Poor Fred was alive and is dead', how could anyone argue that this is not a genuine predication about poor Fred? "

³In "Form and Existence" in *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 1954-5, and again in *Three Philosophers*, pp. 88-100.

⁴For an explanation of Geach's use of "predicable" cf. his *Reference and Generality*, section 18.

⁵*Philosophical Investigations* I, § § 37-45.

⁶*Three Philosophers*, p. 91.

⁷A similar doctrine has recently been maintained by Professor R. M. Gale in Chapter V of *The Language of Time*, which largely reproduces an article by him which appeared in *The Monist*, vol. 50 (1966). Unfortunately I was not aware of this in time to incorporate mention of it in the text. Gale's thesis differs from mine in that he holds that, e.g., "The G.W.R. was well-run in 1936" presupposes, not "The G.W.R. existed in 1936", but only "There existed a company named 'The G.W.R.' "

⁸Geach's example, "is an ancestor of so-and-so" (*Three Philosophers*, p.91) is of this kind.