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from *Naming and Necessity*

Let's try and refine the question a little bit. The question really should be, let's say, could the Queen—could this woman herself—have been born of different parents from the parents from whom she actually came? Could she, let's say, have been the daughter instead of Mr. and Mrs. Truman? There would be no contradiction, of course, in an announcement that (I hope the ages do not make this impossible), fantastic as it may sound, she was indeed the daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Truman. I suppose there might even be no contradiction in the discovery that—it seems very suspicious anyway that on either hypothesis she has a sister called Margaret—that these two Margarets were one and the same person flying back and forth in a clever way. At

any rate we can imagine discovering all of these things.

But let us suppose that such a discovery is not in fact the case. Let's suppose that the Queen really did come from these parents. Not to go into too many complications here about what a parent is, let's suppose that the parents are the people whose body tissues are sources of the biological sperm and egg. So you get rid of such *recherché* possibilities as transplants of the sperm from the father, or the egg from the mother, into other bodies, so that in one sense other people might have been her parents. If that happened, in another sense her parents were still the original king and queen. But other than that, can we imagine a situation in which it

would have happened that this very woman came out of Mr. and Mrs. Truman? They might have had a child resembling her in many properties. Perhaps in some possible world Mr. and Mrs. Truman even had a child who actually became the Queen of England and was even passed off as the child of other parents. This still would not be a situation in which *this very woman* whom we call Elizabeth the Second was the child of Mr. and Mrs. Truman, or so it seems to me. It would be a situation in which there was some other woman who had many of the properties that are in fact true of Elizabeth. Now, one question is, in this world, was Elizabeth herself ever born? Let's suppose she wasn't ever born. It would then be a situation in which, though Truman and his wife have a child with many of the properties of Elizabeth, Elizabeth herself didn't exist at all. One can only become convinced of this by reflection on how you would describe this situation. (That, I suppose, means in some cases that you won't become convinced of this, at least not at the moment. But it is something of which I personally have been convinced.)

What right would you have to call this baby from completely different parents—in what sense would she be—*this very woman*? One can imagine, *given* the woman, that various things in her life could have changed: that she should have become a pauper; that her royal blood

should have been unknown, and so on. One is given, let's say, a previous history of the world up to a certain time, and from that time it diverges considerably from the actual course. This seems to be possible. And so it's possible that even though she were born of these parents she never became queen. Even though she were born of these parents, like Mark Twain's character she was switched off with another girl. But what is harder to imagine is her being born of different parents. It seems to me that anything coming from a different origin would not be this object.

In the case of this table, we may not know what block of wood the table came from. Now could *this table* have been made from a completely *different* block of wood, or even of water cleverly hardened into ice—water taken from the Thames River? We could conceivably discover that, contrary to what we now think, this table is indeed made of ice from the river. But let us suppose that it is not. Then, though we can imagine making a table out of another block of wood or even from ice, identical in appearance with this one, and though we could have put it in this very position in the room, it seems to me that this is *not* to imagine *this* table as made of wood or ice, but rather it is to imagine another table, *resembling* this one in all external details, made of another block of wood, or even of ice.