

Edward W. H. Vick

Past and future

I cannot testify to what will happen in the future. I can only predict, await, premise, anticipate, hope. I can testify to what I believe will happen in the future. I can report that. But these are two quite different things.

Statements about future events are predictive and evidence for them is at best probable. Statements about the past have a different status from those about the future

I can look for evidence about past events, assuming that evidence is available. I can look for evidence for present events, assuming it is available. We may have contact with the past and with the present. We do not have contact with the future. We may be able to anticipate it with some degree of probability. But we can only wait and wait until the present comes to us from the future and may now provide evidence for what was predicted in the past. There is thus an asymmetry between statements about the past and present and statements about the future.

We may have listened to a prophet or to someone making a prediction, It is a very common experience. We may have confidence in the prophet and so derive some certainty about his predictions. Even then our certainty is based on the probable but unknown, outcome. It will in due course be tested. But psychological certainty is not evidence. It is a state of mind, sometimes warranted, sometimes not.

In short: We cannot know the future as we may know the present and the past.

We cannot *know* the future. We may and do entertain beliefs about it.

So, claims about the future must be provisional. Our belief will be tested as the future unfolds. Some will be shown to be warranted, others not.