

PHIL 4603: Metaphysics
Prof. Funkhouser
Black, “The Identity of Indiscernibles”

- Recall the definition of the Identity of Indiscernibles provided last time. The Identity of Indiscernibles can be used to define ‘identity’. (But one might wonder if ‘identity’ needs to be (or even can be) defined.)
- *A* states that “being different than *b*” is a property that distinct objects *a* and *b* always differ with respect to. So, here is an argument for the Identity of Indiscernibles that uses this as a premise:

...different things have at least one property not in common.
Thus different things must be discernible; and hence, by contra-
position, indiscernible things must be identical. Q.E.D. (66)

- *B* raises a worry that we need to be careful about: “. . . once you have supposed there are *two* things having all their properties in common, you can’t without contradicting yourself say that *they* are ‘identical’.” (66–67)
- More importantly, *B* notes that *A* is simply claiming that “different things are different”. The above argument is unconvincing because disputes over an alleged identity will always simply be disputes over whether this “being different than *b*” property is lacking for the object in question.

- *A* then gives his second argument for the principle:

The only way we can discover that two different things exist is by finding out that one has a quality not possessed by the other or else that one has a relational characteristic that the other hasn’t.
If *both* are blue and hard and sweet and so on, and have the same shape and dimensions and are in the same relations to everything in the universe, it is logically impossible to tell them apart. The supposition that in such a case there might really be two things would be unverifiable *in principle*. Hence it would be meaningless.
(67)

○ Make sure you understand *A*'s point in his example involving the possibility of multiple hands.

● As a counter-example, *B* presents the example of a symmetrical world containing only two iron spheres.

○ Is *B* correct in claiming that we cannot even name these spheres, or think about one as opposed to the other, from our position outside that universe?

○ *A* insists on a property difference in this case. Which properties? These: "*Being at a distance of two miles from Castor and being at a distance of two miles from Pollux.*" (69)

○ Understand *A*'s handling of the mirror image or duplication worlds.

You don't understand me. They would not postulate 'another side'. A man looking at the 'mirror' would be seeing *himself*, not a duplicate. If he walked in a straight line toward the 'mirror', he would eventually find himself back at his starting point, not at a duplicate of his starting point. (70)

○ Q: Is this merely a verbal dispute over how to describe these duplication worlds? Or, is this a dispute that could be settled by some verification (in principle)? Or, is this a dispute over non-verifiable matters that is nevertheless not merely verbal?