

PHIL 4603: Metaphysics  
Prof. Funkhouser  
Gibbard, "Contingent Identity"

- Gibbard's example: a clay statue that is contingently identical to a piece of clay.

This is supposed to serve as a counter-example to Kripke's claim that all true identity statements between proper names are necessary. (Gibbard does not disagree with Kripke's analysis of Hesperus=Phosphorus as a necessary truth, however.)

I.

- "Identity here is to be taken in a strict, timeless sense, not as mere identity during some period of time. For two things to be strictly identical, they must have all properties in common." (101)

So, Gibbard rejects *temporary identity*: things being identical for some period of time, but then diverging. (Temporary identity is a type of contingent identity.)

- Gibbard gives persistence criteria for pieces or lumps of clay, as well as for clay statues. Note that these criteria are different, so it is possible for a clay statue to go out of existence but not the lump of clay (and *vice versa*).
- The story of Lump1 and Goliath: a lump of clay and a clay statue that come into and go out of existence at the same times. They seem to be identical — after all, they share all their ordinary properties like mass, shape, etc. Though, one could have outlived the other (or been born before the other, etc.). So, they are contingently identical.

II.

- This picture accords with a physical view of the universe: Sameness of fundamental physical parts (e.g., particles) is necessary and sufficient for sameness of object.

III.

- In this section Gibbard offers an alternative to Kripke’s account of proper names (since Kripke’s account rules out contingent identity). Gibbard does not think that we can make sense of “the same thing” in a counterfactual situation. There are different ways of thinking of an object, and depending on the description it is thought under we get different answers to questions concerning counterfactual situations.

To ask meaningfully what that thing would be, we must designate it either as a statue or as a piece of clay. It makes sense to ask what the statue *Goliath* would be in that situation: it would be a statue; likewise, it makes sense to ask what the piece of clay *Lumpl* would be in that situation: it would be a piece of clay. What that thing would be, though, apart from the way it is designated, is a question without meaning. (104)

- Different proper names can refer to the same thing, but under different sortals. E.g., ‘Goliath’ and ‘Lumpl’ refer to the same thing — but the former refers to that thing as a statue, and the latter as a lump. So, rigid designation does not make sense unless understood limited to such a sortal. E.g. ‘Lumpl’ refers to the same *lump* (but not the same thing *simpliciter*) in all possible worlds.

- Gibbard largely agrees with Kripke’s account of how reference is determined in the actual world, and adds that reference in counterfactual situations is partly determined by the sortal (e.g., persistence criteria) that name invokes. These persistence criteria are also assumed in the initial baptism. (Note how ‘Hesperus’ and ‘Phosphorus’ both invoke the same persistence criteria, so the identity between these two names is necessary.)

#### IV.

- Gibbard holds that identity (at least across possible worlds) makes sense only relative to a sortal, not *simpliciter*.

◦ Q: But why doesn’t Gibbard take this attitude about identity within a world?

◦ Kripke’s examples involving Nixon, for example, invoke the sortal ‘person.’ Gibbard claims that these examples are nonsense if ‘Nixon’ is taken generically as referring to something merely as an ‘entity.’ Nor does accounting for transworld identity by stipulation help, because in worlds in which Goliath and Lumpl diverge it is not clear which is the same entity as the Goliath/Lumpl of the actual world.

#### V.–VI.

- But wouldn't contingent identity between objects violate Leibniz's Law? If "they" are identical, then they must have all properties in common. But Lumpl is necessarily identical to Lumpl, and Goliath is not necessarily identical to Lumpl.

- Gibbard responds that the above is not a property attribution because its (the necessity claim) truth is dependent on a description. Like Quine, Gibbard is claiming that the necessity operator creates an opaque context, and identicals cannot be substituted with a guarantee of truth-preservation.

- Gibbard then explains how he accepts Carnap's system for quantification into modal contexts. [We can skim over this.] In non-modal contexts variables take individuals as their values and '=' means identity; in modal contexts variables take individual-concepts as their values and '=' does not mean identity.

#### VII.–VIII.

- Gibbard denies essentialism for individuals (concrete things), but accepts essentialism for individual-concepts. In short, this is because:

Essentialism, then, is false for concrete things because apart from a special designation, it is meaningless to talk of the same concrete thing in different possible worlds. (111)

- Does this then mean there is no *de re* modality? Gibbard responds that concrete things still have modal properties *relative to a sortal*.

#### IX.

- In this section Gibbard acknowledges that his theory is incompatible with a certain account of dispositional properties (namely, one that depends on description-independent transworld identity of concrete things). But, the same maneuver is available as before: Concrete things can have dispositional properties relative to a sortal. (You can largely ignore this section.)

#### X.

- Summary