

PHIL 4603: Metaphysics
Prof. Funkhouser
Chisholm, "Identity through Possible Worlds"

- Q: Can the same individual reside in different possible worlds? And, if so, how are we to determine whether an individual in one possible world is identical to an individual in another?

- One might think that such trans-world identity is impossible because it violates the Indiscernibility of Identicals. But, Chisholm argues that, as with differences across time, these differences across worlds (e.g., in Adam's age) are not *incompatible*. One object can live for 930 years in W^1 and lives for 931 years in W^2 .

- But, imagine a gradual succession of possible worlds in which Adam's properties are gradually changed to match those of the actual Noah, and Noah's properties are gradually changed to match those of the actual Adam.

Should we say of the Adam in W^n that he is identical with the Noah of W^1 and should we say of the Noah of W^n that he is identical [sic] the Adam of W^1 ? (150)

Is there a violation of the Identity of Indiscernibles here? Could it be that the Adam of W^1 and the Adam of W^n are indiscernible but distinct (i.e., the latter is really Noah)? And, of course, what Chisholm has imagined for Adam and Noah could equally be imagined for any other pair of objects (or, at least, people).

- This problem arises by allowing for a slightly different Adam to reside in another possible world:

If it is reasonable to assume that Adam retains his identity through the relatively slight changes involved in the transition from W^1 to W^2 , and so, too, for Noah, then it would also seem reasonable to assume that each retains his identity through the equally slight changes involved in all the other transitions that took us finally to W^n ... But identity is transitive. And therefore, one

might argue, once we allow Adam to exist in more than one possible world, we commit ourselves to affirmative answers to the puzzling questions we have encountered. (151)

- Q: Can we allow for trans-world identity without committing ourselves to such absurdities?

- Chisholm thinks that we can, by appealing to essential properties. Chisholm's essential properties are not just necessary properties. On his usage, any thing in any possible world that has the essential properties of x is identical to x .

But, in the Adam/Noah example, where in the gradual succession of possible worlds do we lose Adam's (or Noah's) essential properties?

It seems to me that even if Adam does have such essential properties, there is no procedure at all for finding out what they are. (151)