

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

1.
 - The Ship of Theseus Problem

Recall the logical features of identity, and transitivity in particular.

Hobbes' twist on the story — the discarded planks are saved and assembled into another ship. Is the slowly modified ship the "real" Ship of Theseus, or is the ship that is made out of the original materials the "real" Ship of Theseus? Or is neither? Or can we simply decide?

- Other cases: fission and fusion
- An extreme proposal: Nothing alters. But should we accept Chisholm's quick dismissal of this proposal, in which he cites the supposed Moorean fact that he exists through change:

Each of us knows with respect to himself that he now has properties that he didn't have in the past and that formerly he had properties he doesn't have now. (274)

2.
 - Two senses of 'identity': i) the loose and popular use, and ii) the strict and philosophical use.

I suggest this: we use the locution 'A is B', or 'A is identical with B', in a *loose* sense, if we use it in such a way that it is consistent with saying 'A has a certain property that B does not have' or 'Some things are true of A that aren't true of B'. (275)

- Chisholm gives 5 different ways in which we are loose in talking about identity. These cases fall into the following categories: mistaking parts for the whole, fission/fusion, confusing non-rigid designators with rigid designators (e.g., "The President of the United States"), type/token confusion (and relative identity), and cases of feigned identity.

3.

- Butler claims that ordinary things (e.g., trees and ships) do not persist in the strict sense. Instead, they are “logical constructions”. But, are persons exceptions to this general claim?

4.

- Mereological essentialism

- Chisholm’s table example is supposed to illustrate the distinction between a thing and that which constitutes a thing.

- Some of the properties of a thing are explained by what presently constitutes it, other properties are not so explained.

Of the properties that our successive table has at any given time, which are the ones that it borrows from the thing that happens to constitute it at that time? The answer is: those of its properties which are *not* essential to it, and those of its properties which are *not* such that they may be rooted outside the times at which they are had. (279)

- Objection: Doesn’t Chisholm admit too many things into his ontology, e.g. too many tables? Chisholm responds by reminding us of the distinction between the loose and strict senses of identity.

- The reductive conclusion:

... when we thus speak of the sameness of a table, what we are saying could be re-expressed in such a way that we refer only to the related objects and not to the ostensible entities we think of them as making up. (281)

In other words, ordinary objects (logical constructions) are nothing “over and above” the temporal parts that constitute them at different times.