IDENTITY, ESSENCE, AND INDISCERNIBILITY* 

Can things be identical as a matter of fact without being necessarily identical? Until recently it seemed they could, but now "the dark doctrine of a relation of 'contingent identity'" has fallen into disrepute. In fact, the doctrine is worse than disreputable. By most current reckonings, it is refutable. That is, philosophers have discovered that things can never be contingently identical. Appearances to the contrary, once thought plentiful and decisive, are blamed on the befuddling influence of a powerful alliance of philosophical errors. How has this come about? Most of the credit goes to a simple argument (original with Ruth Marcus, but revived by Saul Kripke) purporting to show that things can never be only contingently identical. Suppose that $\alpha$ and $\beta$ are identical. Then they share all their properties. Since one of $\beta$'s properties is that necessarily it is identical with $\beta$, this must be one of $\alpha$'s properties too. So necessarily $\alpha$ is identical with $\beta$, and it follows that $\alpha$ and $\beta$ cannot have been only contingently identical. 

* Donald Davidson, Sally Haslanger, Kit Fine, David Kaplan, Noa Latham, Shaughan Lavine, Barry Loewer, George Myro, Sydney Shoemaker, Robert Stalnaker, and David Velleman all made comments that helped me with the writing of this paper.


2 In the prevailing necessitarian euphoria, it has become difficult to recapture the atmosphere of a few years back, when contingent identity was a commonplace of logical and metaphysical theorizing. To cite just two examples, Dana Scott’s "Advice on Modal Logic" ([Karel Lambert, ed., Philosophical Problems in Logic (Boston: D. Reidel, 1970)]) urged that "two individuals that are generally distinct might share all the same properties (of a certain kind!) with respect to the present world . . . Hence they are equivalent or incident at the moment. Relative to other points of reference they may cease to be incident" (165). And most of the early mind/body-identity theorists—U. T. Place, J. J. C. Smart, Thomas Nagel, among others—took themselves to be asserting the contingent identity of mental and physical entities. Smart, for instance, says very explicitly that "on the brain-process thesis the identity between the brain process and the experience is a contingent one" ("Sensations".)
IDENTITY, ESSENCE, AND INDISCERNIBILITY

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concepts of identity are such that a whole is no longer be realized. It seems to me that even concepts as committed to the individual are so enmeshed in a network of other concepts that it is impossible to say what they mean. The Journal of Philosophy.

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The problem of essential properties is central to many areas of philosophy, particularly in discussions of identity and essence. A property is considered essential if it is a defining characteristic of an object in a way that the object cannot exist without it. This concept is closely tied to the idea of identity, as the essence of an object is what makes it what it is to the fullest extent.

Determining the essence of an object often involves identifying its essential properties, which are those that cannot be altered without changing the identity of the object. However, determining what these properties are can be a complex task, as it may require an analysis of the object's behavior in various contexts and under different conditions.

In the philosophy of identity, the question of whether an object's identity is determined by essential properties or by some other factor is a central issue. Some philosophers argue that an object's identity is determined by its essence, while others suggest that it is determined by its history or by its function within a larger system.

Essential properties are often discussed in the context of metaphysics, as they relate to the fundamental nature of reality and the ways in which objects and entities are related to one another. The study of essential properties is important for understanding the nature of identity and the ways in which objects and entities persist over time.

In conclusion, the problem of essential properties is a fundamental question in philosophy, and its investigation can provide insights into the nature of identity, essence, and the fundamental nature of reality.
Identity, essence, and indiscernibility

Identity is the matter of deontological properties, and this in turn is the same thing as indiscernibility.

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DEFINITION, ESSENCE, AND INDISCERNIBILITY

To this extent, essence determines identity.

If $a$ is identical with $b$, then the same essence.

Proof: Let $a$ and $b$ have the same essence. Since $a$ and $b$ have $\mathcal{E}(a) = \mathcal{E}(b)$.

$(g) \quad \mathcal{E}(a) = \mathcal{E}(b)$

This proposition shows that $a$ is identical with $b$.

A property-modal semantic is as follows:

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$[g = d \Leftrightarrow (g) \mathcal{E}(a) \subseteq \mathcal{E}(b)]$

This proposition shows that $a$ is identical with $b$.

$[g = d \Leftrightarrow (g) \mathcal{E}(a) \cap \mathcal{E}(b) = \mathcal{E}(a) \cap \mathcal{E}(b)]$

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are working along similar lines.

Thank you very much for looking into me about this he and Paul Boghossian