Identity and Ping-Pong Possibility

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IDENTITY AND PING-PONG POSSIBILITY

2004

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IDENTITY AND PING-PONG POSSIBILITY

An Honors Thesis
Submitted to the
Department of Philosophy and
The Robert E. Cook Honors College in
Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree
Bachelor of Arts

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January 2005
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Abstract

Talk of possible worlds is often employed to make sense of statements such as "I could have been seven feet tall," "Human civilization could have been overrun by aliens in 1972," or "This particular piece of string is necessarily not longer than itself." These claims do not seem to be controversial – that is, they are in line with intuition – but what of the statement "I could have been a ping-pong ball"? In this paper I will investigate this question by looking at different interpretations of de re representation, various theories of transworld identity, and several takes on haecceitism and anti-haecceitism. My conclusion is that yes, I could have been a ping-pong ball. In defense of my conclusion, I offer a position of total haecceitism that imposes very loose limitations on transworld identity and discuss whether or not the position of sortal essentialism actually poses a threat to my position.
I. Preliminaries

Consider the following three statements:

(1) I could have been seven feet tall.

(2) Human civilization could have been overrun by extraterrestrials in 1972.

(3) This particular piece of string is necessarily not longer than itself.

To aid in the understanding of such claims, philosophers often employ talk of possible worlds. The nature of these worlds is still a point of discord among philosopher, and as of yet no consensus as to how they should be understood and applied has been reached. Some philosophers, such as David K. Lewis, posit the existence of possible worlds as real existing entities, while others, such as W.V.O. Quine, advance the idea of ersatz worlds, that is, worlds which correspond to maximally-consistent sets.¹ Whether or not one believes in possible worlds as real existing entities or as maximally-consistent sets, or even as collections of propositions forming a world-story or any of the other explanations that have been offered to elucidate the notion, philosophers nevertheless continue and progress in their discussion of how these worlds can be applied to questions of modality. After all, what worlds are and how they behave are two separate questions. What follows in this paper will take no formal stance in the former debate, that of what

¹ Lewis (1973), p.90.
worlds really are. For the purposes of this paper, possible worlds should simply be taken as logically-consistent sets of states of affairs that represent ways things could be or could have been, a working definition that I believe most philosophers would agree upon. Though an occasional predilection toward a somewhat Lewisian modal realism may creep up now and then, it will be my best intention to abstain from taking a position and keep the arguments here completely independent of the modal realism/anti-realism debate.

The utility of possible worlds is that they aid in our understanding of modal concepts and claims, those involving possibility and necessity. We might say that the above statements (1) and (2) are true because there exists at least one world in which each of those statements is true, and that statement (3) is true because the statement *This particular piece of string is not longer than itself* is true in all worlds. This can be known by returning to our working definition of possible worlds – a world where (1) and/or (2) are true exists because it makes sense to speak of a logically-consistent set of states of affairs in which those statements are true. A world where aliens have taken over our civilization does not lead us to a contradiction, and neither does my being a few feet taller. (3) is known to be true in all worlds because there cannot be a world where a particular piece of string is longer than itself, as such a world would not represent a logically-consistent state of affairs. A string that is both its own length and a length longer than itself must have two different lengths, perhaps 3” and 5”. Claiming that a single string is both 3” and 5” in length leads us to a contradiction, and as such, we know
that in all worlds, a string cannot be longer than itself.

These possible world concepts and modal notions lead to a perplexing question when considered in relation to the notion of identity but before raising this key question, a clarification is perhaps in order. “Identity” is not meant here to refer to an individual’s identity in the typical sense, such as personality or social identity. Rather, I use “identity” to refer to an individual’s distinctness, that which individuates it from other individuals. My identity is that which, whatever it may be, makes me distinct from my surroundings, allowing me to be identified separately and distinctly from my clothing, chair, desk, keyboard, etc. This paper will deal exclusively with these notions of metaphysical identity and ignore issues of personality, social identity, etc.

To return to the question alluded to above, there is an uncontroversial notion that individuals are by definition limited to a single spatiotemporal location. If this is so, how can we say that I could have been seven feet tall? To do so, we must say that there is some world, call it \( w_2 \), where I really am seven feet tall. That implies that I exist both here in this world and there in \( w_2 \), an implication which jeopardizes my very status as an individual. This, I would believe, is quite a paradox. Furthermore, and even more troubling since possible worlds need not be real, existing entities, we run into a problem when comparing qualitatively the same individual across worlds. Since the me in this world is five and a half feet tall and the me in \( w_2 \) is seven feet tall, the two individuals are not qualitatively identical, which violates the also typically uncontroversial Indiscernibility of Identicals, formulated as follows:
**Indiscernibility of Identicals:** if $x$ and $y$ are the same individual, then $x$ and $y$ have the same properties. Whatever properties can be truly predicated of $x$ must also be truly predicated of $y$.

Section two of this paper will address the debate regarding *de re*\(^2\) representation by comparing Lewis' counterpart theory to a more tenable theory of transworld identity, which allows for modal claims while respecting the Indiscernibility of Identicals. Sections three, on the other hand, will attempt to show that the Indiscernibility of Identicals is not nearly as uncontroversial and intuitive as one might initially believe. As a result of this finding, I will also use section four to advance the transworld identity positions of Robert Adams and Alvin Plantinga.

As is typical, though, finally sealing one can of worms only opens up several more. Upon the rejection of the Indiscernibility of Identicals and the acceptance of transworld identity, a further and even more perplexing question steps into the spotlight: if I exist in several worlds, perhaps one where I am seven feet tall, one where I am bald, and so on, is there perhaps a world where I am, say, a ping-pong ball? Adams and Plantinga, even as proponents of transworld identity, think that this question is absurd, and that to answer it in the affirmative is even more so. It very well may seem absurd, but I will contend that if one is committed to transworld identity, one is further committed to the possibility that I could have been a ping-pong ball. Section five will discuss this commitment, as well as whether or not this result should be considered a

\(^2\) *de re* =df "of the thing;" as opposed to *de dicto*, which =df "of the name."
reductio ad absurdum of the transworld identity position.

The final sections of this paper will deal with issues related to the “ping-pong possibility” discussed in section five. Section six will provide a look at a specific niche of the de re representation argument, that of haecceitism. The positions of haecceitism and anti-haecceitism will be addressed and defined, as will several variations on both positions. Finally, section seven will contain an examination of sortal essentialism, a position stating that categorization devices known as sortals are essential to an individual’s identity, and this view’s repercussions (or lack thereof) on the notion of ping-pong possibility.

It should be noted early and very clearly, however, that my advancement of this position of ping-pong possibility is not an attempt at “clever philosophy” or anything of the sort. I believe that the rejection of my position held here – and indeed rejection appears to be a common reaction of many philosophers – is inconsistent with the more general de re notions held by those very same philosophers. The problem is nested, though definitely present – understanding modal claims requires an understanding of possible worlds, which in turn requires an understanding of de re representation, which then further requires an understanding of what the limitations on such representation are. This paper is my attempt to answer this final nested question in an effort to shed some further light on the more general problems. Part of understanding an individual is to understand ways that individual could be, and this paper is my attempt to sort through and clean up a bit of the modal mess.
II. Transworld Identity and Counterpart Theory

There are two relevant theories pertaining to *de re* representation, counterpart theory and transworld identity theory, which are proposed in order to solve a major problem that arises from the very concept of *de re* representation. When making the claim that I could be seven feet tall, it is customary to say that this is so because in some world I exist with the property of *being-seven-feet-tall*. This, as we have seen, violates the Indiscernibility of Identicals. For example, assume that in some world \( w_1 \), I am named \( a \) and in another world \( w_2 \), I am named \( b \). Since both names are referring to me, we can then say that \( a = b \). Given the Indiscernibility of Identicals, however, if \( a \) in \( w_1 \) is five and a half feet tall and \( b \) in \( w_2 \) is seven feet tall, there is no way that \( a \) and \( b \) can be the same individual. If this is the case, it does not make sense to say that I could be seven feet tall because I have that property (*being-seven-feet-tall*) in another world, since that seven foot tall being in \( w_2 \) is not really *me*. In a metaphysical nutshell, this would then mean that possible worlds cannot do their intended job – that is, helping to understand modal claims.

In an attempt to solve this problem, David Lewis proposes what he calls his counterpart theory. Under this view, identity is worldbound, which is to say that any given individual can exist in at most one world and no others. You and I exist in this world and this world alone, and this worldbound identity is intended to avoid the problem brought about by the Indiscernibility of Identicals. As such, Lewis readily admits that the seven foot tall individual in \( w_2 \) is not *me*, and therefore makes no
contention against the claim that \( a \) cannot be the same individual as \( b \) if the two possess differing properties. Instead, Lewis would claim that \( a \) and \( b \) are what he calls counterparts, beings sufficiently similar to one another for the purpose of transworld identification. Counterparts are similar enough that, though \( a \) and \( b \) are different and distinct individuals, they share a common bond sufficient for considering them the same for modal purposes. According to Lewis, "your counterparts resemble you more closely in content and context in important respects. They resemble you more closely than do the other things in their worlds. But they are not really you." What Lewis means here is that in other worlds there exists an individual that resembles me in important, relevant aspects more so than any other individual in that world resembles me in those same aspects, and that individual acts as my counterpart in that world. Modal claims are then understood by reference to these counterparts – I could possibly be seven feet tall because in \( w_2 \), my counterpart is a seven foot tall being.

Even though it successfully circumvents the problems with the Indiscernibility of Identicals, Lewis’ counterpart theory is not very satisfying as it fails to allow for proper \textit{de re} representation. There are two major reasons for this failure. First, it is conceivable that there is a world where there exist two grey-eyed, blonde, male college students named Fred who are exactly the same in every respect save two minute distinctions. The only differences between the two Fred’s is that one, which we will call \( Fred_1 \), is seven feet tall and has a fair complexion, while the other, \( Fred_2 \), is five and a half feet tall and possesses purple skin. Aside from the differences in height and skin color, the two
Fred’s are entirely qualitatively identical, we must ask then, which is the original Fred’s (henceforth Fredₐ) counterpart? Lewis says that counterparts “resemble you more closely than do the other things in their worlds,” but as can be seen from Fred₁ and Fred₂, this leads to an ambiguity. Both Fred’s resemble Fredₐ to an equal degree — they are tied, so to speak. Lewis gives no criteria for distinguishing between these two beings and determining which is Fredₐ’s counterpart proper. He would also be unlikely to concede that Fredₐ could have two counterparts in the same world since this would go against a consistent reading of his work and also make the understanding of modal claims tortuous. As such, the inability to determine whether, Fred₁ or Fred₂ is Fredₐ’s counterpart in the world in question is a weakness of the theory.

The second objection to counterpart theory is quite straightforward, perhaps to the point of coming off as trite. Nonetheless, it is an objection that I believe proves fatal to the theory. Lewis explains claims about the ways that I could have been by describing the ways in which my counterparts in other worlds are or have been. However, just as I am not my cat or anything else that is not me, I am not my counterparts, as we are all different individuals. It is doubtful that anyone would venture to say that you could explain ways that I could have been by describing the ways in which my cat is. This is obvious, since my cat is not me and describing something that is not me is not any way to make a claim about the way that I am. Similarly, describing a counterpart — something that is in principle not me — is not a convincing way to say anything about me, modal or not. As similar to my counterpart as I may be in all of the important and relevant aspects,
it is still by definition not *me* – if it were, we would again run into the problem with the Indiscernibility of Identicals. My counterpart is no more me than is my cat, and as such, claims about my counterpart do not have any bearing on *me*. Claiming that in \( w_2 \) my counterpart is seven feet tall is making a claim about my counterpart in \( w_2 \) and only my counterpart in \( w_2 \).

To his credit (and much is deserved), Lewis does address the above “it’s not me” objection.\(^3\) It may be a result of my misunderstanding, but I do not understand how any argument can protect against this objection. If we take as fundamental the idea that I am not my counterpart and also the idea that statements about a specific individual are about that individual and no other, the claim that we can make statements that are about something that is not me and have those statements be about me appears to be a contradiction, and I take this contradiction to be a fundamental problem of the theory. Again, there may be work going on here that I am not fully grasping, but I am confident that there is indeed a contradiction in fundamentals of theory.

Counterpart theory is an attempts to respect the Indiscernibility of Identicals by positing worldbound individuals and understanding modal claims through counterpart relations, but this attempt fails because it loses sight of the individual actually under discussion. Alvin Plantinga’s theory of transworld identity, however, is not plagued by such problems. Plantinga’s account of transworld identity takes it that individuals are not worldbound by any means – quite the opposite, actually, as Plantinga claims that

\(^3\)Lewis (1986), p.217.
individuals can exist in several worlds at the same time without running into such problems as discussed above, including the violation of the Indiscernibility of Identicals. This violation can be neatly avoided through the introduction of world-indexed properties*.

Recall the first clause in the definition of the Indiscernibility of Identicals, which states that, if \( x \) and \( y \) are the same individual, then \( x \) and \( y \) have the same properties. If this is the case, it seems nonsensical to say that an individual could be a certain way by stating that in one world the individual is that way but in another world it is another, since again, owing to their qualitative differences, the individuals in the two worlds are not the same individual. World-indexed properties, however, allow for all instances of the same individual throughout all worlds in which that individual exists to be entirely qualitatively identical, hence without a violation of the Indiscernibility of Identicals. With world-indexed properties, the me in \( w \), really is qualitatively identical to the me in \( w_2 \).

According to Plantinga, I could be seven feet tall because I have the property of \textit{being-seven-feet-tall-in-}w_2. I also have the property of \textit{being-five-and-a-half-feet-tall-in-}w; since we are actually in \( w \), the latter property could be said to be the "active" or "actual" property. I have both of the aforementioned properties in both worlds, and in all worlds in which I exist, and in addition to these, I also have the properties of \textit{being-two-feet-tall-in-}w_3, \textit{being-seventy-two-feet-tall-in-}w_4, and so on. If properties are world-

\* Plantinga (1973), p.150.
indexed, it would follow that each instance of an individual would be qualitatively identical; the me in $w_i$ is qualitatively identical to the me in $w_j$, $w_k$, $w_s$, etc. The apparent differences lie in which properties are actualized, a fact which is determined by the world at which we are currently looking. An individual's actual properties are based on its actual world, which is indexical just as are here and now. This move successfully allows for individuals to exemplify different properties in different worlds without actually possessing differing properties, thus respecting the Indiscernibility of Identicals.

Just as there were problems with counterpart theory, however, Plantinga's theory of tranworld identity is not without its own faults. Suppose that there are two individuals: a large, blue square named $a$ and a small, red triangle named $b$. It is surely possible that $a$ could have been small, so $a$ must have the property of being-small-in-$w_2$. Similarly, $a$ could have been red rather than blue, so it also has the property of being-blue-in-$w_j$, and furthermore, it could have been a triangle rather than a square, so on top of the aforementioned properties is being-triangular-in-$w_s$. These three properties create no logical contradiction when combined, so it follows that we could say that there is a world $w_s$ where $a$ is small instead of large, red instead of blue, and triangular instead of square. This means that $a$ also has the properties of being-small-in-$w_s$, being-red-in-$w_s$, and being-triangular-in-$w_s$. In $w_2$, then, $a$ is qualitatively identical to $b$ as $b$ is in $w_2$, so it might seem more intuitive to say that $a$ in $w_2$ is $b$, rather than $a$. This claim, however, goes against the notion of tranworld identity, and seems to show fault in the system of world-indexed properties.
The above might seem like a strong objection to transworld identity, but I believe that after close examination, it is not only completely compatible with such a theory, but will also work to strengthen points to be made later in this paper. If in \( w \), \( a \) is qualitatively identical to \( b \) and we still wish to say that \( a \) is \( a \), rather than \( b \), there must be some non-qualitative factor that determines identity. This, I believe, as Robert Adams does, is a *thisness* or *haecceity*, which will be discussed at greater length in the remaining sections.

Both counterpart theory and transworld identity theory offer explanations of how to understand individuals *de re*, and both theories face objections. Looking at the respective objections, however, it seems that counterpart theory is by far the weaker of the two. Lewis attempts to explain aspects of an individual by referencing another, different individual, which, as I hope to have shown, cannot work. Again, I cannot explain anything about myself by reference to my cat, or my shoe, or my father, or any other individual for the main reason that they *are not me*. Being *not me* is binary, meaning that something is either me or it is not. There is no middle ground – there are no individuals that are closer to being me than others. Claims specifically about another individual cannot provide information about me, modal or not. Plantinga’s argument, though facing its own objections, does not run into this problem. The theory of transworld identity explains aspects of me by reference to *me*. For this reason, I think that the theory of transworld identity is preferable to counterpart theory. The *not me* objection and the problems of ambiguity give reason enough to abandon counterpart
theory, so even if the theory of transworld identity is somewhat flawed, it may very well now be the only player left in the game.

Before continuing, however, I will address another objection that is raised against de re representation in general, particularly against transworld individuals. Part of the nature of individuals is that they are limited to one spatiotemporal location, meaning that they can only be in one place at any given time. Saying that the same individual can be in two worlds at the same time stands in direct defiance to this nature. How can an individual, which is limited to being in one place at a time, exist in its entirety in two separate worlds? If individuals are spatiotemporally confined in such a way, transworld identity cannot make any sense whatsoever. Individuals by their very nature and definition seem to be worldbound.

This objection can be rebutted in two ways, depending on the stance one takes on the issue of modal realism. If one rejects modal realism, the above is simply not a problem. Individuals do not really exist in other worlds, since those worlds themselves do not really exist. On the other hand, if one embraces such a realism, we must remember that possible worlds are by definition spatiotemporally independent from one another. There is no way to get from one world to another, no way to peer into another world, and no way to draw a continuous timeline between two worlds. Worlds operate on completely independent and incongruous spatiotemporal frameworks. As such, does it really make sense to say that transworld individuals are existing in two places at the same time? Time $t$ in $w_1$ is not the same time $t$ as in $w_2$, so even if an individual $a$ exists
at \( t \) in both worlds, it is existing at different times. Furthermore, it does not seem unreasonable (at least in my eyes) to suggest an addendum to the spatiotemporal limitation imposed on individuals, expanding the confinement to say that individuals can exist at only one spatiotemporal location within any given world. This addendum does nothing to weaken the already established definition of individuals except for making them more compliant with the theory of transworld identity.\(^5\)

In this section, I have attempted to show that transworld identity theory is the preferable means of \textit{de re} representation. Individuals are not worldbound, and transworld individuals do not violate the Indiscernibility of Identicals. What follows will be a discussion of how these individuals across worlds are related to one another.

\section*{III. Transworld Identity and Primitive Thisness}

In his account of transworld identity, Robert Adams uses the notion of a \textit{thisness},\(^6\) a particular element possessed by an individual that allows that individual's identity to carry over across worlds. Adams defines his notion as follows:

\begin{quote}
\textbf{Thisness:} “the property of being identical with a certain particular individual - not the property that we all share, of being identical with some individual or other, but my property of being identical with me, your property of being identical with you, etc.”\(^7\)
\end{quote}

\(^5\) At such a suggestion, some might claim that this addendum is \textit{ad hoc}, but I believe that it is not as much a revision as it is a clarification. Taking possible worlds into consideration in the context of spatiotemporal limitations on individuals is simply a way of updating those limitations, helping them "get with the times" more than it is altering them to fit a theory.

\(^6\) Also commonly called a \textit{haecceity}, from the Latin for "thisness.”

\(^7\) Adams (1979), p. 172.
This goes beyond mere self-identity, the “property that we all share,” and is instead the property that a has of being identical to a, that Fred has of being identical to Fred, and that my left shoe has of being identical to my left shoe. Every individual therefore has a thisness unique to it, possessed by no other individual, and this unique thisness is the essential property that links that individual across multiple worlds.

Adams makes the claim that an individual’s thisness is primitive, which is to say that the possession of a thisness cannot be explained “as consisting in other, more basic relations.” He does this by arguing against the Identity of Indiscernibles, formulated as follows:

Identity of Indiscernibles: “the doctrine that any two distinct individuals must differ in some suchness,” where a suchness is any property that is not a thisness (a’s being identical to a), a relation to another individual (a’s being to the left of b), or a relation to a set of individuals (a’s being an American).

If the Identity of Indiscernibles can be successfully rejected or at least suitably called into question, we would see that qualitatively-identical but distinct individuals can exist. From this, Adams takes it to follow that the individuation of two individuals can only be accounted for by reference to something primitive.

The argument against the Identity of Indiscernibles is as follows. Adams invokes the notion of the “almost indiscernible twin,” an individual that is strikingly similar to

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8 Ibid, 179.
9 Ibid, 175.
another individual. Suppose that one twin, whom we shall call Olaf,\(^{10}\) has a dream on his 27\(^{th}\) birthday that consists of his being chased by a *ten-horned* fire-breathing dragon. The other twin, whom we shall call Sven, has a strikingly similar dream at the very same moment, also his 27\(^{th}\) birthday, but his dream consists of being chased instead by a *seven-horned* fire-breathing dragon. Aside from the slight difference in dreams, Olaf and Sven are qualitatively identical, both before, during, and after the dream – Adams "assume[s] that the number of horns is little noted nor long remembered, and that any other, causally associated differences between [Olaf's] and [Sven's] lives and parts of the world are slight and quite local."\(^{11}\) Under the Identity of Indiscernibles, this small difference in the twins' dreams is sufficient reason to consider Olaf and Sven distinct individuals; after all, one has the property of *having-dreamt-of-a-ten-horned-dragon*, while the other has the property of *having-dreamt-of-a-seven-horned-dragon*. As these properties meet the criteria for consideration as suchnesses, Olaf and Sven differ in a suchness and are therefore distinct.

Adams goes on to say that "we can infer the possibility of indiscernible twins from the uncontroversial possibility of *almost* identical twins."\(^{12}\) The number of horns in the dreams is by no means necessary, which is to say that either dragon could have actually had any number of horns without affecting the identity of the respective twin. For example, if Olaf's dragon would have had *six* horns rather than *ten*, this would

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\(^{10}\) It should be noted that the names "Olaf" and "Sven" were not actually used by Adams.


presumably not have any effect on the rest of his existence. His dragon could easily have had four horns, three horns, or any other number without affecting any other aspect of his identity. It is also possible that Olaf’s dragon could have been the one that had seven horns while Sven’s dragon would have been the one that had ten, effectively switching the twins’ one and only qualitative difference. It is unlikely that one would claim that with this swap of qualitative differences would come the swap of identities, that Olaf would become Sven and vice versa simply due to the swap of something as trivial as dreamt dragon horns. The number of dragon horns in the dream is simply not relevant to identity claims about either of the twins.

If both dragons had had seven horns, the twins would be entirely qualitatively identical. Given that the number of dragon horns is not essential, it seems quite absurd to say that, since the difference in quantity of dreamt dragon horns is the only thing that allows for distinction between the two, Olaf’s dragon could have had any number of horns except for the exact equivalent of the number of horns on Sven’s dragon. If so this would imply that, even though the number of horns is not necessary, if the two twins had an identical number, they would no longer be distinct. If the number is not essential, the twins could be qualitatively identical and should still remain distinct. Furthermore, Adams asks us to “consider the state of [the world] when [Olaf] and [Sven] are 22, five years before the distinctive dreams.”

At this point in time the two are distinct, though the differentiating property has not yet come to be. Through Olaf and Sven, Adams has

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13 Ibid, 178.
shown us that the Identity of Indiscernibles may not be as intuitive as it initially appears, casting upon it enough doubt for the purposes of this argument.

By arguing against the Identity of Indiscernibles, Adams has shown that two qualitatively identical individuals can be distinct, from which he believes it to follow that thisnesses must be primitive. A thisness is that which grants identity – Olaf is Olaf because he has that specific thisness. If Olaf and Sven have identical properties and distinct identities, those identities must be based on primitive thisnesses. This primitive identity, however, is not bound to this world, which can be argued for using an example that refers back to Max Black’s description of a world containing nothing but two qualitatively-indiscernible iron globes, referred to in a display of Lockean appreciation as Castor and Pollux. There is nothing illogical about claiming that it is possible that either one or both of the globes could at some time go out of existence. Suppose then that there is a world where Castor goes out of existence at , but Pollux does not. The state of affairs in this world is different from the state of affairs in a world where Pollux goes out of existence at , but Castor does not. The two worlds proposed are both qualitatively identical after the annihilation of their respective globes, but the worlds are still different – after all, historically, in one world, Castor was annihilated, while in the other, it was Pollux that bit the dust. If the two worlds are qualitatively identical yet differ in respect to which identity was destroyed, that identity cannot be grounded in

either world, implying that identity is not worldbound. If identity is transworld and identity is primitive, it follows that transworld identity is primitive as well.

Arguments against Adams' conclusions could be made by opposing either his attack on the Identity of Indiscernibles or his use of Black's iron globe scenario. Those who wish to oppose Adams' attack on the Identity of Indiscernibles might take one of two positions. First, one might hold that though we can speak of such concepts as almost indiscernible twins and derive the notion of qualitatively-identical individuals from them, in reality these are just word games or perhaps even gibberish - in short, no such individuals can exist. We can speak of Olaf and Sven, but are there actual examples of Olafs and Svens like these anywhere in reality? Or is it more that we speak of the twins as we speak of unicorns and hippocrieffs, which are not real existing entities? Second, issue might be taken with the use of properties such as having-dreamt-of-a-seven-horned-dragon, since such properties are a far cry from more traditional properties - being red, being square, being large, etc. If having-dreamt-of-a-seven-horned-dragon is not an acceptable property, Adams' argument may face a serious obstacle.

Being the more straightforward of the two, I will address the latter issue first. If one accepts a property such as being red, it is likely that one will also accept variations on that property, such as the properties being reddish-brown, being crimson red, being brick red, etc. It also seems quite acceptable to say that all properties can be written in a longer, time-indexed format; if a house is red at time t and later painted blue, the house would always have the property of being-red-at-t, even after t. Furthermore, if being red
is an acceptable property, *is dreaming* must be acceptable as well, as both express actions or states of affairs related to the individual. Based on these claims we can now see why *having-dreamt-of-a-seven-horned-dragon* is an acceptable property. Just as *being red* can be made more specific in the form of *being crimson red*, so too can *is dreaming* be made more specific in the form of *is-dreaming-of-something* — in our case, *is-dreaming-of-a-seven-horned-dragon*. If such a property is time-indexed, we end up with *is-dreaming-of-a-seven-horned-dragon-at-\(t\)*, which, after \(t\) has come to pass, can be reasonably shortened to *having-dreamt-of-a-seven-horned-dragon*. Despite the apparent differences, *having-dreamt-of-a-seven-horned-dragon* and *being red* are actually quite similar properties (in the sense of structure, of course, not descriptive content).

Returning now to the first argument, some may hold that in reality, there are no beings that are as qualitatively similar as Olaf and Sven and, as such, Adams’ argument cannot even get off the ground. This is a very strong point, though I believe that entities such as Olaf and Sven need not actually exist in order to successfully argue against the Identity of Indiscernibles. Beings such as Olaf and Sven are conceivable entities — I use *conceivable* here because there is no logical contradiction that comes from the account of Olaf and Sven as presented above. Though it is debatable, I contend that conceivable, and therefore not-actual-but-possible twins are enough to satisfy the criteria for almost indiscernible twins. If the twins are conceivable and as such lead to no logical contradiction, we can say that even if Olaf and Sven do not actually exist, they do exist in some world, which I believe offers up an answer. This is based on little more
than my own intuition, but that intuition is very strong and to this point I have not seen any convincing reason to claim otherwise.

As previously stated, one might also attempt to challenge Adams' position by taking issue with his use of Black's iron globe scenario. Graeme Forbes attempts to do just this. Rather than saying that transworld identity is primitive, Forbes argues that instead transworld identity can be explained as transtemporal identity holding across a branching point. He lays out a system of possible worlds different than that held by Adams – whereas in an analysis of the iron-globes Adams would most likely posit three worlds $w_1$, $w_2$, and $w_3$ all existing infinitely forward and backward with historical parallels, Forbes describes a branching scenario. In this view, $w_1$ is a world as described by Black, and at $t$, when one of the globes goes out of existence, the worlds $w_2$ and $w_3$ branch off from $w_1$. From this branching conception, Forbes finds his new ground for identity: if one would look at $w_2$ or $w_3$ and trace back the histories of those worlds to before $t$, when both globes existed, one could see which globe, Castor or Pollux, went out of existence. If, when tracing back $w_2$ you find that it was the result of Castor going out of existence, you know that it is distinct from $w_3$ which finds Pollux going out. Forbes grounds transworld identity in this tracing-back of entities across branching points spanning possible worlds. If transworld identity is grounded in such a manner, by reference to transtemporal identity, it is no longer primitive.

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Adams: worlds exist infinitely with historical parallels

Forbes: worlds branch at temporal divergence points

Figure 1: Adams' and Forbes' Transworld Identities

Though Forbes does make strong points, his position is an unnecessary convolution of possible world talk. By introducing a branching conception, Forbes raises the question of how possible worlds actually go about branching, as it seems to follow from his view that \( w_2 \) and \( w_3 \) did not exist prior to \( t \), which also raises the question of how possible worlds come into existence. If worlds branch from one another, it also seems to imply a heavy overlap between worlds, a concept which arguably leads to be nothing but trouble and which I believe Lewis has argued successfully against.\(^2\) Forbes also admits that as per his branching conception the idea of three globes existing instead of the two in \( w_1 \) is at the "limits of intelligibility"\(^3\) and that such a world cannot exist. This is a strange claim – there is no contradiction that comes from the idea of three

\(^{17}\) Lewis (1986), p.198. It should be noted that while I agree with Lewis' arguments against overlap amongst worlds, I reject the fact that this rejection entails the falsity of transworld identities. Identity is not something that overlaps worlds, but something that exists outside of those worlds - transworld - altogether.

\(^{18}\) Ibid, 151.
gloves existing infinitely backwards instead of two, so I believe that it should be
admissible in possible worlds talk. Forbes’ branching conception makes no
improvements on Adams’ view and only further complicates matters. Recalling
Ockham’s Razor, Adams’ view is preferable, and as such, I will continue to advance the
position of primitive transworld identity.

In this section I have attempted to advance Adams’ position through his argument
against the Identity of Indiscernibles. If the Identity of indiscernibles fails, as the
dreaming twins give us reason to hold as a definite possibility, it would mean that two
qualitatively identical individuals could not only exist but also exist in the same world.
If a and b are qualitatively identical yet distinct, there must be some non-qualitative and
primitive factor which individuates the two entities. Identity transcends worlds and
identity is primitive, hence this factor must provide some sort of primitive transworld
identity, and it is on this factor that I will base my account of ping-pong possibility.

IV. Transworld Identity and Essence

Recall Plantinga’s system of world-indexed properties used to avoid the violation
of the Indiscernibility of Identicals. Using these properties, all instances of an individual
in all worlds in which that individual exists are qualitatively identical, and the apparent
differences of the individual in each world are based upon the active or actualized
properties. As stated earlier, this creates a problem: in \( w_n \), an individual might have an
apparent set of properties, but in some other world, that list of properties might be
entirely switched with another individual. In some other world, for example, I am a ninety-two year old purple-skinned female orc named Kiki Ramirez, living in the Florida Keys. How then is it possible for anyone to pick me out, to identify that individual in that world as me? If someone were to peer into that world, how could they determine if I even exist if they cannot pinpoint where or who I am? It seems that there must be some "empirically manifest" property that would allow the observer to pick me out.

Furthermore, that empirically manifest property must be unique to the individual, since otherwise it would allow you to perhaps pick out more than one individual (for example, if the empirically manifest property is being-five-and-a-half-feet-tall, you would not be able to single me out, but rather single out the set of all individuals possessing such a property). This problem seems to make the theory of transworld identity either unintelligible or perhaps just useless.

Plantinga responds this objection by asking us to consider momentarily the states of individuals at different times. At one point in my life, I was a two-minute old infant who had not yet been given a name. If someone were given the task of peering back in time to pinpoint exactly who I was by trying to find some unique empirically manifest property, that person most definitely would not be able to pick out the infant that I was from any other infant at the time. They might be able to do so using external properties, such as being-the-son-of-x-and-y, but such properties are neither empirically manifest

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19 Plantinga, 148.
20 Ibid, 153.
nor in all cases unique. In this case, however, despite the inability to pick out which infant I was, we would not say that I did not exist at that time, or that I was not the same individual then that I am now. “Most of us will concede that the same object exists at several different times; but do we know of some empirically manifest property $P$ such that a thing is [what it is] at a given time $t$ if and only if it has $P$? Surely not,” Plantinga says.\(^{21}\) If we do not require such a property to pick out individuals throughout time, there does not seem to be a need for one to pick out individuals throughout worlds either.

Plantinga says that “the claim that I must be able somehow to identify Socrates in \(w\) – pick him out – is either trivial or based on a confusion.”\(^{22}\) I concur with this statement, though for reasons separate from those offered by Plantinga. If one is an anti-realist like Plantinga, worlds are taken to be constructed conceptually, meaning that all we need to do “peer into” a world is conceive of that world. On the other hand, if one is a realist, it seems to be some sort of mistake to claim that we can even “peer into another world” and “pick out” an individual at all. In a modal realist view, possible worlds are spatiotemporally and causally disconnected from our world – of course we cannot peer into another world to pick something out, as we cannot even peer into another world to begin with. Speaking in such terms, though perhaps useful on a surface level, is letting too much into and thus making less rigorous the possible world jargon, which will create unnecessary confusion. Realist or anti-realist, all we must be able to do to identify an

\(^{21}\) Ibid, 154.
\(^{22}\) Ibid, 154.
individual in one world with that same individual in another world is stipulate that relationship, which we can do independently of properties.

Plantinga claims that what allows for this identification is an individual's essence, which is very similar if not in definition then in practical application to Adams' concept of thisness. Plantinga defines essences as follows:

\[ \text{Essence: "Take any property } P \text{ and world } W \text{ such that [an individual } A \text{] alone has } P \text{ in } W; \text{ the property of having } P \text{ in } W \text{ is an essence of } [A]."} \]

In my case, part of my essence would be \textit{being-the-only-son-of-x-and-y-in-w}, but so too would be \textit{being-the-second-son-of-x-and-y-in-w}, since there assuredly exists the possibility that I could have had an older brother. "And obviously," Plantinga adds, "we can find as many essences of [an individual] as you like."\textsuperscript{23} If there are an indefinite number of essences for each individual, and these essences provide for individuation, the entirety of those essences could be said to form an individuating set. For the sake of simplicity, when the remainder of this paper speaks of "essences," it is speaking of not the particulars but rather of the total set of essences that apply to an individual.

This essence, a set of non-empirical properties, is that which grounds my transworld identity. Though this is different than Adams' primitive transworld identity in that Plantinga's essences can be explained in consisting of more basic relations, both views hold that something non-empirical, i.e. something purely metaphysical, accounts for identity across worlds. Whether or not this is a unique non-empirical properties in

\textsuperscript{23} Ibid, 156.
\textsuperscript{24} Ibid, 156.
the form of an essence or a primitive thisness, the two positions concur that identity is based on something metaphysical and unique to the individual. The remainder of this essay hinges on this individuating metaphysical *something* as well as world-indexed properties, which are compatible with either view. Though there are conceptual disagreements between Adams and Plantinga, these key similarities make the acceptance of either position suitable for the purposes of this paper.

In this section, I have defended Plantinga's view of transworld identity and shown how essences are very similar in practical use to Adams' primitive thisnesses. At this point, I hope to have shown that identity is transworld and grounded in something metaphysical and unique to the individual. If I have been successful, and I would like to believe that I have, it is now appropriate to address the controversial question introduced much earlier in this paper: if I exist in several worlds, is there a world where I am a ping-pong ball?

V. Ping-Pong Possibility

Adams and Plantinga agree that identity transcends worlds and that identity is non-qualitative in the sense of empirically manifest properties. Adams claims that identity, and for that matter transworld identity are explained by an individual's thisness, while Plantinga claims that they are explained by an individual's essence. Both of them, however, would most likely reject the notion that I could have been a ping-pong ball.
Adams states that:

[The] conclusion, that there cannot be any purely qualitatively necessary conditions for the possession of any given thisness, is absurd, however. It implies that you, and I, for example, could have been individuals of any sort whatever - plutonium atoms, noises, football games, places, or times, if those are all individuals.²⁵

It can probably be assumed that ping-pong balls would have also made it on to Adams' list if it had been suggested to him at the time.

Like Adams, Plantinga, here speaking of the sense of "possibility" under discussion, says that:

[On] the other hand, this sense is narrower than that captured in first-order logic, so that many states of affairs are necessary, in the sense in question, although their corresponding propositions are not provable in first-order logic. Examples of such states of affairs would include...[my] not being a composite number, and the like.²⁶

Again, it is likely that if one had similarly suggested the possibility of someone being a ping-pong ball to Plantinga at the time of his writing, he would have included my not being a ping-pong ball as an example of states of affairs not provable in first-order logic but nonetheless necessary. I will argue that these judgments are a bit hasty. According to Adams' position, thinking things such as the possibility of my being a ping-pong ball is "absurd," but he offers no real reason beyond that. Plantinga discounts the notion from the beginning, restricting his use of the term "possible" to preclude the

²⁵ Adams, 181.
²⁶ Plantinga. 147.
acceptability of such claims, but never really addresses why he chooses to do this. It seems, though, that the proposition that I could have been a ping-pong ball is completely acceptable as per both of their transworld identity theories. In fact, I believe that both are committed to such ping-pong possibility.

Plantinga says that I could have been seven feet tall if I have the property of *being-seven-feet-tall-in-w*. Suppose that we claim that human beings could have been made out of plastic rather than flesh and bone. This claim does not lead us to a logical contradiction; therefore, you might say that I have the property of *being-made-of-plastic-in-w*. Obviously my shape is not necessary to my identity, lest I stop being who I am if I gain a little weight or lose an arm, so it seems that I should also have the property of *being-round-in-w*. Just as with shape, so with size – add in the property of *being-one-inch-tall-in-w*. Sentience is not necessary to my identity either, so as a final property on our list, add in *being-nonsentient-in-w*. These properties, when taken together, do not lead to any sort of contradiction, so it is entirely possible to think of me having all four of them at the same time in the same world; in addition to the aforementioned properties, I also have *being-made-of-plastic-in-w*, *being-round-in-w*, *being-one-inch-tall-in-w*, and *being-nonsentient-in-w*. In *w*, then, I am effectively a ping-pong ball.²⁷ There is no

²⁷ Of course, this short list of properties may not be sufficient for status as a ping-pong ball. Since there are ping-pong balls in existence, however, we can be sure that the collection of all properties necessary for being a ping-pong ball do not lead us to a contradiction when combined. As such, any property that I might have overlooked is most definitely compatible with those listed above, so any that are left out of my incomplete list can be added in until the list is complete.
empirically manifest property that would allow one to pick me out in such a world, but as Plantinga has already shown, there need not be such a property.

One might object to the preceding statements by saying that sentience is in fact necessary to my identity. Consider, however, the case of a chair possibly being a ping-pong ball. If that chair had the properties being-made-of-plastic-in-\(w\), being-round-in-\(w\), and being-one-inch-tall-in-\(w\), that chair would be a ping-pong ball in \(w\), without problem.\(^{28}\) This seems acceptable, but if the chair example is accepted and the example regarding myself is not, it implies that the notion of identity assigned to the chair and the notion assigned to myself are two different notions. That, however, seems to privilege ourselves a bit, and comes off as anthropocentric.

Sentience, I argue, is not a necessary property of any being. Take, for example, the recently deceased Uncle Boris who is currently lying in a casket at a funeral. When grieving relatives walk in and ask “where is Boris?” the funeral director would point to the casket. He would not say “I have no idea who you’re talking about, there is no one with that identity here.” If an old friend who had not heard the news randomly walked into the funeral and unwittingly asked “how is Boris doing?” someone could easily reply with “Boris is dead.” This implies that we think of individuals as retaining their identity even after death, and death surely is a nonsentient state.

It may be argued that this is merely social convention, and that this “identity” that we assign to Uncle Boris during his funeral is not a metaphysical identity. After all,

\(^{28}\)Unless, of course, you are a sortal essentialist. This will be addressed in section seven.
saying that this identity continues after the funeral is quite disturbing, as it means that if someone were to ask “where is Boris?” a year later, we would have to say “he is buried under the ground, decomposing while being eaten by worms.” From a Western perspective, it is far more commonplace to say “he has gone to a better place.” I contend, however, that this, the common Western perspective, is where the social convention lies. The grim truth is that the decomposing, worm-eaten form is still Boris. Further examples will help to make this clear.

Suppose that Uncle Boris had signed a living will stating that at the initiation of the dying process, he wished to be cryogenically frozen so that, in the future, when the appropriate technology is available, he may be restored and revived. While in this frozen state, Boris is non-sentient, but upon being thawed he returns to full sentience. Would we say then that while frozen, Boris does not exist since he is non-sentient? It is perhaps more intuitive to say that while frozen Boris’ sentience is suspended, meaning that even while he is non-sentient, Boris retains his identity.

Suppose instead that before dying, Uncle Boris had taken an excursion to Greece. While on his vacation, Boris stumbled upon the infamous snake-haired Medusa. Upon making eye contact, Boris is petrified, literally. Would we say that Boris has stopped existing? If speaking in terms of personal or social identity, then perhaps we may, but when speaking of metaphysical identity, Boris definitely still exists. The object that Boris is has not changed except for losing the quality of sentience. If he was petrified at time $t$, we could still draw a continuous line from Boris-with-sentience before $t$ to the
Boris-sans-sentience after \( t \). This continuous line is evidence that the entity that is Boris still exists.

If a more straightforward and realistic example is desired, consider the possibility that Uncle Boris simply gets hit on the head with a brick and lapses into momentary unconsciousness. Unconsciousness, the lack of consciousness, is characterized also by the lack of sentience. During this temporary state of unconsciousness, we would most likely not say that Boris has stopped existing and, upon his awakening, starts existing once again. Instead, we would say that Boris' existence continues through his unconsciousness, implying again that sentience is not an essential part of any being's existence. If I am correct, being-nonsentient-in-w, is an acceptable property.

Though Plantinga objects to this idea of ping-pong possibility, his espoused philosophy leads to such conclusions. Similarly, though Adams' philosophy seems to commit one to possibly being a ping-pong ball, his only argument against this conclusion is that it is “absurd,” which brings to mind David Lewis’ comments about “incredulous stares”\(^29\) – they are not effective counterarguments. Both Plantinga and Adams, in committing to transworld identity, must also commit to ping-pong possibility, and also to the fact that I could have been an alligator, a plutonium atom, the Eiffel Tower, or this very paper. These conclusions follow directly from the transworld identity theories proposed by both Adams and Plantinga.

Thus far I have attempted to show that the theories of Adams and Plantinga are

\(^{29}\) Lewis (1973), p.86.
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necessary to my identity. Consider, however, the case of a chair possibly being a ping-
pong ball. If that chair had the properties being-made-of-plastic-in-$w_7$, being-round-in-
$w_7$, and being-one-inch-tall-in-$w_7$, that chair would be a ping-pong ball in $w_7$ without
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\(^{29}\) Lewis (1973), p.86.
correct, and if I have done so, I believe that ping-pong possibility is a truth that must be accepted as well. Some might take this conclusion as a reductio ad absurdum of transworld identity, abandoning the entire position rather than accepting its "absurd" consequences. After all, is it not rational to start working on a new theory once your old theory tells you that you could have been a ping-pong ball? Well, I do not think so, and I do not think that it is necessary to abandon the position at all. Plantinga has shown that there need be no empirically manifest property in order to "pick out" an individual in different worlds; all we need is an essence, thisness, haecceity, or what-have-you, and both Adams and Plantinga have given us these already. If a ping-pong ball could have my essence or thisness, which I believe I have shown, there is no problem other than the uncomfortable idea that in some world I am being beaten around with ping-pong paddles. It may be a weird thought, true, but then again, would you really call spatiotemporally and causally disconnected possible worlds and non-qualitative primitive thisnesses all that normal?

VI. Haecceitism, Anti-Haecceitism, and Related Positions

In an attempt at further clarity, I will now discuss some views of transworld identity that I hope will provide an elucidation of my position that is both deeper and more subtle. These views deal with what are known as haecceitistic differences between worlds. Lewis defines haecceitistic differences between worlds those cases which find "two worlds [differing] in what they represent de re concerning some individual, but do
not differ qualitatively in any way."^° For an example of such a difference, imagine a world qualitatively identical with this one but where all of my qualities are assigned to your identity, and all of your qualities are assigned to my identity. In that world, you are the short, grey-eyed male philosopher and I am, well, whatever you are. The world differs in no qualitative respect, since the you in that world is qualitatively identical to the me in this world and vice-versa, but there is a difference in identity. In this section, I will briefly canvass several positions: haecceitism, the view that haecceitistic differences amongst worlds do exist; anti-haecceitism, the view that haecceitistic differences amongst worlds do not exist; moderate haecceitism, the view proposed by Adams and discussed throughout the preceding sections of this paper; moderate anti-haecceitism, a view held by Gary Legenhausen which claims that sortals are prior to thisnesses or haecceities when determining identity; extreme haecceitism, the view that limits little when it comes to transworld identity, but stresses the accessibility of worlds; and total haecceitism, my own position.

In On the Plurality of Worlds, Lewis refers to David Kaplan’s description of haecceitism, which Kaplan describes as the view “that a common ‘thisness’ may underlie extreme dissimilarity or distinct thisness may underlie great resemblance.”^31 This description is divided into two different claims. First, haecceitism claims “that a common ‘thisness’ may underlie extreme dissimilarity” — meaning that there is

[^31]: Ibid, 220.
something aside from empirically manifest qualities which can be used to identify individuals across worlds. Given an individual \( a \) in world \( w_1 \) and an individual \( b \) in \( w_2 \), there is no purely qualitative way to discern whether or not \( a \) or \( b \) are numerically identical, or are in Lewis’ terms counterparts. Even if \( a \) and \( b \) have no common qualities, they may still have the same identity due to sharing a common thisness. Haecceitism also claims “that a distinct thisness may underlie great resemblance,” which is to say that even if \( a \) in \( w_1 \) and \( b \) in \( w_2 \) share every single quality, they may still possess different thisnesses and as such, have different identities. Recall the earlier example where in another world I have all of your qualities from this world and you have all of mine. Me being identical with the you-like me in the other world is an example of the first claim of haecceitism (a common thisness underlying extreme dissimilarity) and me being not identical with the me-like you in the other world is an example of the second (a distinct thisness underlying great resemblance).

Lewis states that “haecceitism claims that some non-qualitative aspect of worlds makes at least some contribution to determining representation \( de \ re \); anti-haecceitism denies it.”\(^{32}\) The position of anti-haecceitism, Lewis says, is “the doctrine that there are no cases of haecceitistic difference between worlds.”\(^{33}\) As per this view, the world postulated in the example from the preceding two paragraphs could not exist, since there must be some qualitative method for discerning identity; that is, there is no way to pick

\(^{32}\) Ibid, 223.
\(^{33}\) Ibid, 221.
out which individual in \( w \) is me without a reference to some of my qualities. This means that at least some qualities must be essential to my identity. As can be seen, the difference between haecceitism and anti-haecceitism is quite blunt: the former view accepts the existence of haecceitistic differences, while the latter denies it.

   It is important to note that Lewis believes that a haecceitist does not necessarily have to commit to the existence of haecceities or thisnesses, and similarly, an anti-haecceitist does not have to necessarily reject them. A haecceitist, for example, might make the claim that there are haecceitistic differences in the world, but that these are not the result of the existence of haecceities, but instead the result of some other identity-binding entity such as a bare particular or a unique and individuating set of possible configurations of qualities. An anti-haecceitist could similarly accept haecceities, but also deny that they are any reason to accept haecceitistic differences in the world; under this view, identity between transworld individuals would seem to require not only a common thisness, but also some sort of qualitative similarity. More will be said about this second position later in this section, as it is very similar to the view of Adams.

   The problem with Lewis' anti-haecceitism and his arguments against haecceitism is that they rely on the acceptance of counterpart theory. Lewis states:

   "we should reject haecceitism not for any very direct reason, but rather because its intuitive advantage over the cheap substitute – if indeed it has any advantage at all – costs us far more trouble than it's worth."\(^{34} \)

\(^{34}\) *Ibid.* 228.
Haecceitism should not be accepted, Lewis argues, because it is too burdensome in the long run. He makes this claim, however, under the explicit framework of counterpart theory, attempting earlier to prove his theory and then taking it as a premise for the rest of his arguments. In Section Two of this paper, I believe that I have shown why transworld identity theory is more tenable than counterpart theory, which pulls one of the legs out from under Lewis' platform.\textsuperscript{35} Furthermore, Lewis rejects haecceitism not on logical grounds, but on grounds of practicality - we should reject it because it is too much trouble. I disagree. Haecceitism is not only more compatible with intuition, as Lewis concedes, but anti-haecceitism leads to a conflict with primitive transworld identity, which I have argued should be accepted.

If counterpart theory is to be rejected, so too must anti-haecceitism.\textsuperscript{36} Does this mean, however, that we must accept haecceitism? If those two positions were the only two in the game, then perhaps yes, but Lewis also details differing degrees of the position. \textit{Extreme haecceitism} imposes very few qualitative limits on haecceitistic difference. Under this view, worlds \textit{do} exist where I am, as I would say, a ping-pong ball, or, as Lewis would say, a poached egg, but the statements “I could have been a ping-pong ball” or “I could have been a poached egg” are still both false. This is a result of the extreme haecceitist rejecting worlds that are not accessible from our world, or rather, worlds that are not considered relevant when assessing counterfactual claims. According

\footnote{\textsuperscript{35}Or at least weakens the leg, causing the platform to wobble quite a bit.}

\footnote{\textsuperscript{36}Unless the position can be formulated independent of Lewis' grounding, but to my knowledge this has not been done.}
to Lewis,

"We tacitly ignore," Lewis explains, "worlds where the past differs, where the actual laws of nature are violated, where there are alien natural properties, or what have you...we [ignore] far-out worlds where things differ too much in qualitative character from the way they actually are."

Though there exists a world where I can suddenly metamorph into a bat and fly away, such a world would be dubbed inaccessible because it has different laws of nature than our actual world. For this reason such a world is not taken into consideration when evaluating counterfactuals such as "if I were to drink this potion, I would suddenly metamorph into a bat and fly away."

Lewis seems quite sympathetic to extreme haecceitism, even claiming that "the extreme haecceitist's theory parallels [his] own." As such, at first it may seem that extreme haecceitism is a strong position, as it offers up much of what Lewis' account of anti-haecceitism can do without forcing us to accept counterpart theory. The problem, however, lies in that the extreme haecceitists can simply ignore worlds that are not dubbed accessible. Here Lewis is as guilty as Adams and Plantinga in the qualification of positions to avoid strange or perhaps undesirable consequences. Why, other than to avoid these consequences, should we ignore worlds where the past differs? This would mean that we would ignore any other world if any event had gone differently, which seems to make all events essential and lock us into determinism. Similarly, why ignore

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37 Ibid. 240.
38 Ibid. 248.
worlds where the actual laws of nature are violated? Doing so makes the laws of nature, physical laws, necessary when speaking in modal terms – that is, logical terms. The laws of nature are not logically necessary and worlds where they differ should not be ignored. If we limit ourselves to Lewis’ notion of accessible worlds, we face several problems. How do we know which limitations to impose on accessibility? The picking of different laws of nature, a different history, and different natural qualities seems quite arbitrary, and the idea of deeming a world inaccessible if it “differs too much” from our world raises the question of “how much is too much?”. When we reach for claims of accessibility and inaccessibility, we find ourselves teetering on a slippery slope.

Extreme haecceitism is a strong position if the limitations on accessibility are removed, though this would change the heart of the position. The position that I have taken in this paper while advocating ping-pong possibility could perhaps be called total haecceitism – that is, extreme haecceitism without the limitations on accessibility.

Of course, this is far from the end of the matter as there are other positions to be considered. In “Primitive Thisness and Primitive Identity,” Adams gives a name to his position, that which was discussed earlier in this paper (Sections Three and Five), saying:

“if a name is desired for the position I have defended here, according to which thisnesses and transworld identities are primitive but logically connected with suchnesses, we may call it Moderate Haecceitism.”

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39 Adams, 182.
In a move similar to Lewis’ move in limiting extreme haecceitism, Adams claims that thisnesses and transworld identities are logically connected with suchnesses in order to escape the “absurdity” of my being a ping-pong ball, plutonium atom, etc. This connection is why the view is called moderate haecceitism – it is haecceitistic in that it allows for haecceitistic difference between worlds, but it limits it by making suchnesses essential to transworld identities.

Adams does not, however, attempt to prove this logical connection or give an example of what an essential suchness might be. Instead, he simply makes the claim that there is a logical connection, which is a move very similar to Lewis’ move which I called into question in the preceding paragraphs. I do believe that Adams’ limitation on moderate haecceitism is unnecessary – the only reason why he claims that this logical connection exists is that it apparently must exist in order to avoid the consequences, namely ping-pong possibility. I have already defended the reasons why I think that ping-pong possibility is not a reductio and as such should not be treated as some sort of dead end, so it seems that moderate haecceitism is unnecessarily limited. When the limitations requiring essential suchnesses are lifted, however, the view becomes very similar to what I now call total haecceitism.

The final position which I will discuss is Legenhausen’s moderate anti-haecceitism, designed to counter Adams’ moderate haecceitism. Legenhausen summarizes his view as follows:
"The position advocated here is moderate anti-haecceitism, moderate because it allows that there may be differences between individuals which do not exhibit different qualities, yet anti-haecceitist because it denies that thisnesses are metaphysically primitive."^40

This view holds two main principles. The first is that thisnesses are non-qualitative, and the second is the denial that thisnesses are primitive. Legenhausen concurs with Adams on the former, but attempts to argue for the latter by defending the Identity of Indiscernibles from the likes of Adams and Black. Whether or not this defense works is not at issue since it leads Legenhausen to the conclusion that sortals are essential to identity. Legenhausen states that:

"the property of being a bird is an essential property, according to [moderate anti-haecceitism], because there is no possible entity which is a bird in one possible world and something else in another... Since no bird could have been or could become anything but a bird, it is reasonable to adopt the policy of treating the property of being a bird as essential."^42

Though he does not specifically use the language, it seems safe to assume that Legenhausen would grant that the property of being a bird is very similar to the sortal bird. It is because of this reliance on the essential nature of either properties or sortals that I believe that moderate anti-haecceitism fails; the next section of this paper will detail the reasons why I do not believe that sortal essentialism is as of yet a strong position.

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^41 Ibid, 632.
^42 Ibid, 637.
In this section, I have discussed different views of transworld identity and the reasons why I believe that they do not lead to strong positions. If not for the imposed limitations on accessibility and essential suchnesses as seen in extreme haecceitism and moderate haecceitism, respectively. I believe that those two theories, which are actually quite similar, would prove successful. Again, my position could be seen as extreme haecceitism without the limitation on accessibility and as moderate haecceitism without essential suchnesses. In naming my position, I have offered total haecceitism.

VII. Sortal Essentialism

In this final section, I will address the view of sortal essentialism. As per this view, if an individual is a human (or an object of type x) in our world, it is a human (or x) in all other worlds in which it exists. If sortal essentialism is accepted, there is no way that I could have been a ping-pong ball as there is no way that I could have been anything other than a human. To argue against this, I will turn to the writings of Penelope Mackie, specifically “Sortal Concepts and Essential Properties,” to reach three goals. First, I will attempt to lay out and adequately define the position of sortal essentialism. Second, employing Mackie’s arguments, I will attempt to show why sortal essentialism is not a tenable position as of yet. Third and finally, I will attempt to build on Mackie’s arguments in an effort to show that sortal essentialism is not just a rough position in need of refining, but rather a faulty position that should be abandoned.
According to Mackie, a sortal or sortal concept is defined as follows:

Sortal: "A concept is a sortal concept if and only if it provides a criterion of identity (principle of individuation) for the things that fall under it," where a principle of individuation is that which allows us to individuate an object from all other objects, to pick it out as a separate and distinct entity.

Sortals are categories that by their nature allow for the individuation of each object in the set of objects that fall under them. Though there is no agreed-upon and comprehensive list, common examples of sortal concepts include human, feline, rock, tree, and so on.

A special type of sortal is the essential sortal, which Mackie defines as follows:

Essential Sortal: "A sortal concept S is an essential sortal if and only if the things that fall under S could not have existed without falling under S."

Say, for example, that human is an essential sortal. If this is the case, all individuals that fall under the sortal human (which is to say, all humans) could not have existed under any sortal other than human. All humans are therefore humans in all worlds in which they exist. The position of sortal essentialism is quite simply the view that there are essential sortals.

Before continuing, there are two other types of sortals that will prove useful to define, the first of which is that of the substance sortal. According to Mackie, a substance sortal is:

\[^{33}\text{Mackie (1994), p. 313.}\]
\[^{34}\text{Ibid, 313.}\]
Substance Sortal: "A Sortal that must apply to an object throughout its entire existence if it applies to it at all."^1

This is generally taken to mean "once an F, always an F" – if an individual comes into existence as a feline, it must spend its entire existence as a feline, unable to change its substance sortal to, say, canine or bovine. It is entirely possible for an individual to possess multiple substance sortals; for example, a given individual might possess both leopard and feline, poodle and canine, or cow and bovine.

The second type of sortal to be defined is that of the ultimate sortal, which Mackie defines as follows:

Ultimate Sortal: "S is an ultimate sortal if and only if S is the most general sortal corresponding to some principle of individuation."^2

Returning to the feline and leopard example above, the sortal feline would be the ultimate sortal since it is far more general (that is, contains all of the same and more individuals) than the sortal leopard. All leopards are felines, for example, but not all felines are leopards – there are, after all, lions and tigers and cheetahs. Some controversy lies, however, in whether or not sortal concepts such as feline should be considered ultimate sortals, as it seems that there are others that are more general yet. Further generalizing, one could reach the sortal concepts of mammal, vertebrate, animal, living thing, material object, or even object generally.

Now that I have defined the various types of sortals under discussion in this

^1 Ibid, 323.
^2 Ibid, 322.
section, I will turn to Mackie’s arguments against sortal essentialism. In particular, I will be looking at the arguments made against David Wiggins.\(^{47}\) Wiggins holds two principles at the heart of his position: the Essentiality of the Principle of Individuation, (henceforth EPI), and the Absolute Identity Principle (henceforth AIP). In laying out Wiggins’ account, Mackie defines these principles as follows:

**EPI:** If an individual \(x\) has a principle of individuation \(P\), then \(x\) could not have existed without \(P\).\(^{48}\)

**AIP:** An individual cannot change its principle of individuation over time, nor can it have two different principles of individuation simultaneously.\(^{49}\)

AIP, Mackie claims, is completely acceptable, and I am inclined to agree. All that this principle claims is that if a sortal provides a principle of individuation to an individual, that individual is stuck with that sortal throughout its existence. Furthermore, though individuals can have several sortals (i.e. *feline* and *leopard*) that might all provide principles of individuation, all that do so must provide compatible, non-contradictory principles of individuation. This does not seem to pose any problem for one who opposes sortal essentialism, given its modal emphasis. In fact, Mackie even points out that AIP in no way follows from EPI, though Wiggins tends to treat it as though it does.\(^{50}\)

Compared to AIP, EPI is a much more difficult principle. Mackie argues that it can be given two interpretations, and then shows that no matter which of these

\(^{47}\) Wiggins (1980).
\(^{48}\) Ibid., 321.
\(^{49}\) Ibid., 323.
\(^{50}\) Ibid., 323.
interpretations is given, EPI fails to give any sort of credibility to the position of sortal essentialism. These two interpretations will now be explained and argued against, in turn.

EPI(1): If an individual $x$ has a principle of distinction and persistence $P$, then $x$ could not have existed without $P$.\textsuperscript{51}

This interpretation of EPI claims that sortals grant individuals notions of distinction – that is, being able to be picked out separately from all other individuals – and persistence – that is, being recognizable as lasting over time. Any sortal that lends an individual such a principle is an essential sortal, and that individual could not have existed in any other way. Mackie believes that even if this interpretation is correct, we have no reason to accept principles of individuation as essential, meaning that we have no reason to accept sortal essentialism. This is primarily due to problems in the interpretation of which sortals actually provide us with principles of individuation. As stated earlier, the same individual can fall under the sortals leopard and feline. More generally, it could also fall under mammal, vertebrate, living thing, material object, or object generally. More specifically, it might also fall under snow leopard and even male snow leopard. We now have at least ten different sortals that all apply to the same individual – in which sortal does the principle of individuation lie?

Furthermore, Mackie states that:

\textsuperscript{51} Ibid, 324.
“Wiggins claims that not all animals have the same principle of individuation, while
conceding that human beings may share their principle of individuation with some other
animal (although he does not specify which these are).”

If not all animals share the same principle of individuation, and humans share it with
some animals, how do we know from where this principle originates? A man might have
the same principle of individuation as a leopard but not as a chicken. Wiggins gives us
no criteria for how to determine if this is so. This is dangerously ambiguous – dangerous
enough, in fact, to be considered a major weakness of EPI(1).

There are several arguments that could be made in favor of EPI(1), though
Mackie successfully argues against all of them (or at least a great deal of the relevant
ones). In this section, I will focus on what I believe to be the single most relevant
argument Mackie gives. To say that something could have been different is to say that
it could have become different, and, as per the definition of sortals and AIP, things
cannot come to have different substance sortals. This argument seems to presuppose
sortal essentialism, however, in using the definition of sortals and AIP to help
demonstrate the essentialism. One who rejects sortal essentialism could reply by saying
that an individual could have been different before it became anything; rather than
become something else, the individual in question might have instead started out under a

52 Ibid, 325.
53 It might be said that this is a problem with sortals themselves instead of being a weakness of EPI(1) and,
hence, sortal essentialism. I believe, however, that problems with sortals become problems with sortal
essentialism; after all, sortals are the heart of sortal essentialism, and if they are flawed, is the whole
position not flawed as well?
54 For the remainder of these short arguments and rebuttals, see Mackie, p. 326-330.
55 Ibid, 326.
different substance sortal. Of course an individual under the sortal leopard cannot switch to the sortal lion in the middle of its existence, but there seems to be no reason that it could not have started its existence under the sortal lion rather than leopard.

The second interpretation of EPI is as follows:

\[ \text{EPI}(2): \text{If an individual } x \text{ has a principle of counterfactual existence } P, \text{ then } x \text{ could not have existed without } P. \]

Under this interpretation, EPI contains criteria not only for distinctness in space and persistence through time but also for existence throughout worlds by including a principle of counterfactual existence. This view comes with limitations on how individuals could have been already built in, and makes these limitations essential. Again, this is quite ambiguous – what are these limitations, and how do we come to know what they are? Mackie states:

"I conclude that the thesis EPI(2), that everything has its principle of counterfactual existence essentially, is not much more than a grandiose way of saying that the ways an object could have been are restricted to the ways it could have been."

EPI(2) does not appear to give us any real information at all, making it apparently vacuous. All we can get from this interpretation is that there are things that something could not have been, but not what these "things" are. This information not help to advance the position of sortal essentialism, and does not really tell us anything at all.

Mackie has shown that the EPI, no matter which interpretation is given, does not

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56 Ibid, 330.
57 Ibid, 331.
lend any sort of credibility to the position of sortal essentialism. She is careful to note, however, that “[she] does not conclude that no theory of sortal essentialism could do so,”^58 and furthermore,

“Perhaps, for all that, some version of sortal essentialism is correct. And perhaps it is because sortal essentialism is correct that Aristotle could not have been a centipede, a parsnip, a paper clip or the number 17. But, if I am right, we are not yet justified in claiming to understand why this is so.”^59

I contend something a bit stronger than what Mackie is trying to say.

While she is careful to say that she thinks that sortal essentialism might be correct and just has not yet been correctly formulated, I hold that sortal essentialism is false and has not yet been correctly formulated because it cannot be. I believe that this can be seen if we change the nature of the examples used when discussing sortal concepts. Often times biological entities are used in examples, as they are already neatly divided up into taxonomies of genus, species, and so on, but this lends a false sense of ease to the task at hand.\(^60\) When formulating a position like sortal essentialism, we must be careful to allow it to include all individuals, not just biological entities such as leopards and chickens, but artifacts such as books and knives as well.

Artifacts are defined by their functions – the functions that we assign – rather than actual intrinsic qualities. For example, a single given object might be a walking stick, a bo staff, a sign post, or a unit of fuel, depending on its assigned function. If a

\(^{58}\) Ibid, 312.
\(^{59}\) Ibid, 333.
\(^{60}\) Though even this is controversial in the philosophy of biology.
large book is placed in front of a door, it becomes a door stop. If a Lego castle is taken apart and rebuilt into the likeness of a pirate ship, would we not say that the fundamental object has *become* something else? Artifacts make the issue much more complicated, though they deserve just as much consideration as biological entities. Furthermore, as artifacts are defined by their function, an extrinsic feature, it does not seem to make sense to say that there is anything essential about them at all (in regards to sortal concepts, unless perhaps sortals such as *material object* or *object generally* are in fact permitted). Sortal essentialism therefore cannot account and make room for artifacts, and as such, is not a position that I believe should be held.

Some might take issue with my argument by asking why sortal essentialism has to account for both biological entities and artifacts – after all, a theory does not have to cover *everything*. I believe in this case, however, that it does. Sortal essentialism is a metaphysical principle, and as I have stated elsewhere in this paper, setting different metaphysical standards for living things and non-living things seems to unnecessarily privilege living things. Elsewhere, I claimed that we were being anthropocentric; here we are perhaps guilty of organocentricism. Furthermore, the main question at hand in this paper is whether or not in some possible world I could have been a ping-pong ball. I am a biological entity, and a ping-pong ball is an artifact. A metaphysical principle that makes any claim, true or false, about my identity in relation to that of an artifact ought to, I believe, encompass both types of entities. My notion of possibility is not a notion pertaining to just living entities or just non-living entities, but to entities in general. As
per my prior arguments, an individual is still the same individual _qua_ metaphysical individual once it loses sentience through death, so if a notion of possibility is to govern both a living body and an unanimated aggregate of decomposing flesh, bone, and tissue, I believe that it should cover other inanimate entities as well.

As can be seen, the arguments for sortal essentialism give no good reason to accept the position, and the arguments against it give good reason not to. I thereby conclude that the position of sortal essentialism poses no threat to the notion of ping-pong possibility. If there is no sortal concept that I fall under essentially, there is no reason that I could not have fallen under the sortal _ping-pong ball_ rather than that of _human._

VIII. Afterword

In this paper, I have attempted to show that the limitations that we place on _de re_ representation are too strict. I did this by first showing that the theory of transworld identity is preferable to that of counterpart theory, and then by showing that ping-pong possibility follows directly from transworld identity. I introduced the position of total haecceitism to further elucidate my position and argued against its apparent nemesis, sortal essentialism. If I am correct, the theory of transworld identity is correct, and anyone who holds such a theory is bound to total haecceitism.61

61 Many thanks go out to Eric Rubenstein, Mary MacLeod, Dan Boone, Jessica Armstrong, Josh Filler, James Edwards, Angela Musto, and the Robert E. Cook Honors College for their various thoughts and contributions to this paper.
IX. References


