

M. Oreste Fiocco (2021). *There is Nothing to Identity*. Synthese  
 Structura Handout\*  
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## Background & Further Readings:

- Duncan, M. (2020). A renewed challenge to anti-criterialism. *Erkenntnis*, 85, 165–182.  
 Fiocco, M. O. (2019). Each thing is fundamental: against hylomorphism and hierarchical structure. *American Philosophical Quarterly*, 56, 289–301.  
 Langford, S. (2017). A defense of anti-criterialism. *Canadian Journal of Philosophy*, 47, 613–630.  
 Merricks, T. (1998). There are no criteria of identity over time. *Noûs*, 32, 106–124.

## Introduction

### Synchronic vs Diachronic Criteria

1. **Synchronic** criteria of identity account for the existence of a thing (as itself) at a single moment. Often used in ontology: e.g., Quine’s “no entity without identity.”
2. **Diachronic** criteria of identity account for the continued existence of a thing from one moment to another. Often used in personal identity.

### Criteria of Identity

1. **Criterialism**: there are informative criteria of identity illuminating what makes a thing itself.
2. **Primitivism**: that there are no criteria of identity, either synchronic or diachronic, for any kind whatsoever (and could be none).
  - a. The thesis is to defend primitivism.
3. Fregean/Wittgensteinian **Epistemic/Semantic view**: a criterion of identity for some kind is the evidence that would justify one’s judgments regarding the identity (or distinctness) of instances of that kind.
4. **Ontological view**: a criterion of identity is not the means of speaking about a unique thing or of justifiably taking it as such, but rather is what makes a given thing itself.
  - a. The thesis is that the ontological Criterialism is demonstratively false, but the epistemic view is consistent.

### Why There Can be No Criteria of Identity

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\* Much of the handout is direct quotation.

### **Synchronic Identity**

1. Criteria of identity are supposed to be *informative*.
2. Thus, a statement of the criterion of identity for some kind,  $K$ , would be informative (i.e., explanatory) only if it correctly characterized some relation between things in the world, one of which—the explanandum—is an instance of  $K$ 's being itself and the other—the explanans—is the criterion of identity itself.
3.  $R$ , that holds between  $a$  and  $b$  (at  $m$ ) such that standing in  $R$  determines or makes  $a = b$ .
4. In order for a thing to stand in any relation whatsoever, that thing must exist.
5. In order for a thing to exist, it must exist as itself.
6. Being itself is required for it to be related at all. Therefore, there cannot be any such relation in virtue of which  $a$  is itself (i.e.,  $a = b$ ).

### **Diachronic Identity**

1. Very similar strategy: were there a diachronic criterion of identity for some kind,  $K$ , at all, it could only hold between one and the same instance of  $K$  at distinct moments. But then a prerequisite for there being a criterion of identity for  $a$  at  $m$  and  $b$  at  $m'$  is that  $a$  at  $m = b$  at  $m'$ . Therefore, it cannot be in virtue of this relation,  $R$ , that  $a(b)$  is itself over time.
2. Same for perdurantism, no criteria.
  - a. Endurantism: one is three-dimensional and lasts in time.
  - b. Perdurantism: one is four-dimensional and have different three-dimensional parts at different time.
  - c. Given perdurantism: A diachronic criterion of identity for a perduring thing such as  $A$  would be some relation,  $R$ , holding between the momentary temporal parts of  $A$ , for example  $a$  (at  $m$ ) and  $b$  (at  $m'$ ), that is the ontological basis of an explanation for why both are parts of  $A$ .
    - i. But,  $A$  must exist to be in a relation, a fortiori a mereological relation with its parts.

### **Basically**

1. Having a criteria of identity requires a worldly relation between a thing and itself.
2. Such worldly relation requires an existing entity as a relatum.
3. An existing entity must be identical to itself.
4. 2 and 3 are cycle, so there's no such relation.
5. Thus, there's no such criteria. (Or, identity is primitive.)
6. Its being overlooked might be explained by a failure to appreciate what an ontological criterion of identity would have to be or, relatedly, that any informative (i.e., explanatory) account of the identity of a thing—synchronic or diachronic—would have to rest upon an ontological basis of things in the world standing in some relation.

### **Implications**

1. The above argument relies on this:
  - a. A genuinely explanatory account of any phenomenon requires an ontological basis of things in some determinative relation.

2. With the same strategy, some things **cannot be explained**.
  - a. Identity, existence, individuation, unity, essence, etc.
  - b. These are attendants of an entity's existence, thus comes prior to any possible explanatory relations.
  - c. *Each thing, regardless of kind or category, is fundamental.*
  - d. If one encounters a table or tree and one encounters (or otherwise admits) fundamental particles, one ought to regard all of these as equally real and fundamental.
  - e. The grounding, reduction, or whatever relations between entities, do not render their existence non-fundamental.
3. **What can be explained**, and sometimes is, are many of the actual arrangements of things, more specifically, those arrangements that need not be so, merely given the existence of the things so arranged.

### **Why The Rejection of Criteria of Identity is Not Untenable**

#### **The Primary Defense of Criterialism**

1. If there are no criteria of identity, then it is not guaranteed. Fundamentality cannot guarantee things. So there might be a case, when two things share all qualities that they should have, but identity failed. Two possible worlds, and two exactly same things, except that identity holds in only one of them.
2. To avoid this, it seems, one has to introduce *haecceity* (non-qualitative entity determining identity).
3. Mark's response: Haecceity can't help, and primitivism doesn't need it.
  - a. No things can exist in the appropriate way while fail identity. If an instance of that kind stood in exactly those qualitative relations, then it could not fail to persist.
  - b. The kind determines the way for a thing to persist (though it's primitive, it's not arbitrary.)
  - c. There are, then, necessary and sufficient conditions for the persistence of things, yet this is consistent with there being no diachronic criteria of identity.
  - d. But, together, these necessary and sufficient conditions are not **explanatory** and, hence, not informative in the way that criteria of identity are supposed to be.
  - e. The conditions are mere consequences of the primitive persistence of that thing.
  - f. There is a necessary—essential—correlation, given what that thing is, between just those qualitative relations holding between that thing and itself at distinct moments and that thing existing at those moments.

#### **Related Epistemological Objections**

1. Experience of these qualitative relation does not suffice to know that one and the same thing changes—and if such evidence does not suffice, none does.
2. Sydney Shoemaker, Matt Duncan
3. Mark: same response as above. There can be necessary and sufficient conditions, and those will suffice.

### **The Putative Possibility of Fission**

1. Michael Della Rocca's principle (PPP): In a case in which there are objects  $A$ ,  $B$ , and  $C$ ,  $B \neq C$ ,  $B$  and  $C$  are equally and significantly causally and qualitatively continuous with  $A$ , and there is no object besides  $A$  which exists at the same time as  $A$  and which is such that  $B$  and  $C$  are as causally and qualitatively continuous with it as they are with  $A$ , then it cannot be the case that  $A = B$  and  $A \neq C$  and it cannot be the case that  $A \neq B$  and  $A = C$ .
2. Without criteria,  $A = B$  and  $A \neq C$  will be possible.
3. Mark: same response with the necessary sufficient conditions. Primitivism doesn't mean no properties.
4. But, have to deny that persistence is compatible with fission. And humans, or other complex kinds, cannot fission.

### **Conclusion: Primitivism and Its Consequences**

1. There are no criteria of identity, either synchronic or diachronic, for any kind whatsoever (and could be none). Primitivism is correct. Each thing just is (itself) at any moment; when a thing persists, it just is (itself) at distinct moments.
2. Implications:
  - a. Discussions assumed identity is explicable are all misguided (e.g., personal identity.)
  - b. Primitivism does not shed light on persistence (perdurantism vs endurantism, how is it fundamental, etc.). The question of persistence in general depends on a broader investigation of the metaphysics of time.

### **My response: Criterialism of Anti-identity Relations**

1. There is nothing to identity, but there can be something to anti-identity.
  - a. By anti-identity ( $\neq$ ) relations, I mean a relation if established, it is guaranteed that the relata are not identical to each other.
2. We can establish perfect criteria of anti-identity, since in this case, existence comes prior to the relation. And it's hard to imagine that anti-identity, given its abundance, comes in the package of existence. A thing must exist as itself, but it does not have to exist as other things. Thus, we have existence first, then criteria of anti-identity. Here are examples I have in mind:
  - a. Different biological taxonomy (birds vs people)
  - b. Different ontological status (fictional characters vs real people)
  - c. Spatiotemporal non-continuity (maybe)
  - d. Psychological non-continuity (persons, maybe)
3. We don't necessarily need both, identity and anti-identity. One will do the job.
  - a. And note, these anti-identity relation are fairly universal: most things have the spatiotemporal non-continuity relations.
4. This also explains the necessary and sufficient conditions part of Mark's view, as those can be built upon anti-identity criteria, without interfering with the primitivism of identity.