

Lecture 6  
THE PROBLEM OF TRANSWORLD INDIVIDUALS

Reading: Roderick Chisholm (1967), 'Identity through Possible Worlds: Some Questions', in M. J. Loux (ed.) (1979), *The Possible and the Actual* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press), ch. 3.

1. Chisholm challenges the idea that "an individual in one possible world might be identical with an individual in another possible world" (p. 80). Or, perhaps less misleadingly, that an individual can be in two distinct possible worlds.
2. His challenge goes something like the following:
  - a. Suppose it is possible.
  - b. In our world, @, Adam lived for 930 years and Noah lived for 950. Since it might have been that Adam lived for 931 years and Noah for 949, there is a possible world,  $w_1$ , in which Adam *did* live for 931 years and Noah *did* live for 949. (That world will, accordingly, be different from our world in various other ways.)
  - c. We can keep arguing like this, to the conclusion that there is a world,  $w_{20}$ , in which Adam and Noah have exchanged their ages.
  - d. We can keep arguing like this, to the conclusion that there is a world,  $w_{500}$ , in which Adam and Noah have exchanged *lots* of their properties, enough to make Adam in  $w_{500}$  *indiscernible from* Noah in @, and Noah in  $w_{500}$  *indiscernible from* Adam in @.
  - e. The existence of a world such as  $w_{500}$  means that there are worlds that contain Noah, but we do not know, and cannot know, who Noah is in that world.
3. Another problem that he considers and rejects, to do with the indiscernibility of identicals? That is, the principle:

$$(II) \forall x \forall y \forall F [[x = y] \rightarrow [Fx \leftrightarrow Fy]]$$

The existence of @ and  $w_1$  (above) seems to present a counterexample to this: Adam in this world lived for 930 years, not 931, but Adam in that world lived for 931 years, not 930, even though the two are identical.

But consider an analogous problem: Adam as a boy was young, not old, but Adam later in life was old, not young, even though the two are identical. But: both have the property of being *young when a boy*, and both have the property of being *old when a man*, and being So too: Adam lived for 930 years *in* @, and for 931 years *in*  $w_1$ .

4. Is there a way to allow identity through possible worlds while avoiding such problems? The only way Chisholm can see is to appeal to the notion of essential properties:

N is a *non-essential* (or *accidental*) property of a particular  $x$  iff  $x$  has N in some possible worlds but not in others; E is an *essential* property of  $x$  iff  $x$  has E in every possible world in which it exists, and if any particular  $y$  has E in any possible world then  $y$  is identical to  $x$ . (Note: being self-identical, being either red or not red, and being coloured if red are not essential properties of  $x$ .)
5. How does this avoid the problem pointed to by Chisholm? It means that we do have a procedure for finding out which particular in any world is Adam – just look for the particular that has any of the essential properties of Adam: if Adam is in the world, then Adam has all of his essential properties in that world; and if any particular in that world has any of the essential properties of Adam, it can only be Adam.
6. But, objects Chisholm: we don't really have such a procedure, because we don't know which, if any, properties of Adam are his essential properties, and we have no procedure for finding out.

7. Chisholm rejects the following inference (which I have translated into a semantic sequent):

a. Necessarily, for every  $x$ ,  $x$  is identical with  $x$ ; therefore, for every  $x$ , necessarily  $x$  is identical with  $x$ .

b.  $\Box \forall x[x = x] \vDash \forall x \Box[x = x]$

Why? For one reason, it leads to the conclusion that *everything* exists in *every* possible world.

8.