There's No Such Thing as a Coincidence: The inadequacies of one endurantist rejoinder to the perdurantist argument from Descartes-Minus.

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Arguments against endurantism often invoke the *Indiscernibility of Identicals*, a widely accepted principle stating that numerically identical entities have all their properties in common. The force of this principle, perdurantists claim, is to show that any object that has undergone a change in properties is numerically different from whatever existed before the change. In other words, while entities may exhibit degrees of spaciotemporal and causal unity, or relatedness, as they change over time, it is inaccurate to construe that unity as a sign of transtemporal identity. Endurantists, on the other hand, commonly respond by contending that (many) properties are time-indexed, and as long as we speak of them thusly, we shall have no problems reconciling an endurantist theory of diachronic sameness with the *Indiscernibility of Identicals.* For to say that I have acquired an attribute, *F-ness*, between times t_1 and t_2, is just to say that I have the property of being non-*F*-at-t_1 and the property of being *F*-at-t_2. And, of course, there is nothing abstruse in saying I possess both properties simultaneously.

There is, however, one variant of the argument from the *Indiscernibility of Identicals* that poses an unusual challenge for endurantists, which specifically involves change in parts, and is commonly known as the case of Descartes-Minus. In short, it proceeds as follows: Imagine there is an individual, Descartes, whose hand is amputated at time *t*. Endurantists, of course, will endorse the claim that, even though Descartes has suffered the loss of a hand:

(1)   Descartes-before-*t* is numerically identical with Descartes-after-*t*.

In other words, they will say that Descartes is a transtemporal individual who happens to have lost a part, but nonetheless remains numerically the same. We can, however, also imagine another

individual, Descartes-Minus, who consists of all of Descartes except his left hand; in the same way that we might say a stool is made up of four legs and a base, we can say that Descartes-before-*t* is made up of Descartes-Minus and a left hand. Naturally, then, endurantists will be committed to the following:

(2)   Descartes-Minus-before-*t* is numerically identical with Descartes-Minus-after-*t*.

Moreover, because Descartes-Minus-after-*t* has all its parts in common with Descartes-after-*t*, perdurantists want to say that a third statement of identity obtains:

(3)   Descartes-Minus-after-*t* is numerically identical with Descartes-after-*t*.

Because identity is transitive in nature, however, it seems that anyone committed to the truth of 1, 2, and 3 is faced with a serious problem, for this statement, which follows directly from those above, is clearly untrue:

(4)   Descartes-before-*t* is numerically identical with Descartes-Minus-before-*t*.

   One strategy endurantists use to get around this problem is to deny the truth of 3. In order to do so, they are obliged to explain how two entities that occupy precisely the same region of space could be numerically different, and they do this by invoking the fact that Descartes-after-*t* and Descartes-Minus-after-*t* have dissimilar histories, claiming that, as a result, they do not have all their properties in common and hence cannot legitimately be thought identical. The force of this strategy is quite immediate, for surely the property of having once had a left hand is one retained by Descartes-after-*t*, but not by Descartes-Minus-after-*t*. It is important to remember, however, that the distinguishing property in question derives from exactly the kind of change that endurantists want to say does not necessitate change in identity: that of change in parts while persisting through time. And it is this fact that makes their rejoinder to the perdurantist argument from the case of Descartes-Minus somewhat problematic.

   This becomes clearer if we remind ourselves that it is only a contingent fact about Descartes

that he happens to have lost his hand at t. For the sake of argument, let us say that there is a possible world, W_2, in which, as it so happens, he was fortunate to have kept all his parts in tact. Clearly, according to the endurantist, Descartes-before-t in W_2 would be identical with Descartes-after-t in W_2, just as in the actual world. But we can see from this example that it is not the property of having lost a hand, or of having kept a hand, that makes Descartes-after-t stand in numerical identity with Descartes-before-t. We now have a case, as a consequence, where two dissimilar histories, one possible and one actual, both lead to the same result: a relationship of numerical identity between Descartes-before-t and Descartes-after-t. This, of course, is just the sort of thing that endurantists want to prove.

   If, however, the history of one's parts does not (necessarily) determine one's identity relations, then the endurantist is back where she started if she wants to claim that 3 is untrue. Moreover, since, as we have seen, the appeal to separate histories by no means provides irrefutable support for that claim, the endurantist is more obliged than ever to justify the counterintuitive notion of spatially coincident entities. In order to do this, she might prompt us to consider that a collection of matter, a lump of clay for example, is something different than the thing it constitutes, which might for instance be a statue of a horse. She will also remind us that it would be possible to do something to one of those things and not the other, as would be the case if we squashed the clay back into a formless mound; we will have destroyed the horse, but not the lump of clay out of which it is made. Hence, she will contend, the exact same region of space that is occupied by a horse statue can also be occupied by a quantity of clay, and these two things aren't numerically identical.

   But is it really that straightforward? In other words, does the fact that I can describe the same thing variously, perhaps first in terms of content and later in terms of form or function, and that it is possible for me to manipulate that thing in a way which alters the truth value of one of those descriptions but not the other, entail that I am actually describing two seperate entities? It seems to me that the relationship between a pattern or manifestation (e.g. the horse), and the lower-

order stuff, that comprises it (e.g. the clay), while admittedly open to debate, cannot reasonably be understood to be so extreme as to involve two discrete items. In any case, in my view, an explanation ruling out the possibility of spatially coincident objects has just as much going for it as one that relies on it. At very least, there is nothing, so far as I can tell, in the single-entity rendition that can be thought erronious at first blush. And it has the advantage of being both more intuitive and more parsimonious.

If we retrace our steps for a moment, we can also apply the above reasoning to counter the earlier appeal we examined involving dissimilar histories. That is, we can ask, are we actually referring to two seperate and unrelated histories when we speak of Descartes-after-t and Descartes-Minus-after-t, or is it more appropriate to think of those two histories as having converged into a single, indissoluble history, precisely at t? Again, if such an interpretation is understood to be at least as valid as the endurantists, then the endurantist will have to do better if she wishes to reason away the force of the argument from Descartes-Minus.