

**The Chinese University of Hong Kong  
Department of Philosophy  
2023-24 Term 1**

**PHIL5180/ PHIL7180  
Special Seminar on Selected Philosophical Issues**

**Course Outline**

The Principle of Identity of Indiscernibles, a traditional metaphysical topic, goes back at least to the Stoics and has been proposed and defended by various philosophers of various different persuasions, among them Leibniz, Bolzano, and McTaggart. It simply says that things cannot differ *solo numero*, i.e. merely numerically. Sometimes this is explained as the idea that things must differ qualitatively, but, as we shall see in the classes, this is not exactly what the principle means.

The first class will provide an introduction to the principle, distinguishing several versions of it, and clarifying issues surrounding its formulations and its philosophical import.

The second class will discuss the relationship between the so-called Bundle Theory of Universals and the Principle of Identity of Indiscernibles. It has been traditionally argued that the Bundle Theory entails the Principle of Identity of Indiscernibles, but this argument has been rejected. Such arguments will be discussed.

Philosophers have often stated that there is a trivially true version of the Identity of Indiscernibles. I will have argued in the first class that this is a wrong idea. But even if it is wrong, the question remains of how to properly formulate the weakest version of the Principle of Identity of Indiscernibles, and this involves characterizing the trivializing properties. This is a difficult task and rarely do philosophers get involved in it. In the third class I will propose a way of characterizing trivializing properties.

The fourth class will be a discussion of two arguments for the weakest version of the Principle of Identity of Indiscernibles.

**Teacher: Prof. Rodriguez-Pereyra, Gonzalo**  
**Time: Fridays 2:30 - 5:15 pm**  
**Venue: Lee Shau Kee Building LT4 (LSK\_LT4)**

**1st session (8 September 2023). The Principle of Identity of Indiscernibles. An introduction.**

**Required Reading:**

Black, M. 1952. 'The Identity of Indiscernibles', *Mind* 61, pp. 153–64.

Rodriguez-Pereyra, G. 2022. *Two arguments for the Identity of Indiscernibles*, Oxford: Oxford University Press. Chapter 1.

**Recommended Reading:**

Rodriguez-Pereyra, G. 2014. *Leibniz's Principle of Identity of Indiscernibles*, Oxford: Oxford University Press. Chapter 2.

**2nd session (15 September 2023) The Bundle Theory and the Principle of Identity of Indiscernibles.**

**Required Reading:**

O’Leary-Hawthorne, J. 1995. ‘The Bundle Theory of Substance and the Identity of Indiscernibles’, *Analysis*, 55, 191–96.

Rodriguez-Pereyra, G. 2004. ‘The Bundle Theory is compatible with distinct but indiscernible particulars’, *Analysis* 64, pp. 72–81.

**Recommended Reading:**

Bielinska, M. 2023. ‘Are the realist bundle theorists committed to the principle of constituent identity?’ *Kriterion* <https://doi.org/10.1515/krt-2023-0002>

Robert, G. 2019. ‘Can the Realist Bundle Theory Account for the Numerical Difference Between Qualitatively Non-Discernible Concrete Particulars?’ *Theorema* 38 pp. 25–39.

**3rd session (22 September 2023) Trivializing and Non-Trivializing Properties.****Required reading:**

Rodriguez-Pereyra, G. 2022. *Two arguments for the Identity of Indiscernibles*, Oxford: Oxford University Press. Chapter 2.

**Recommended readings:**

Katz, B. 1983. ‘The Identity of Indiscernibles Revisited’, *Philosophical Studies* 44, pp. 37–44.

**4th session (29 September 2023) Two arguments for the Identity of Indiscernibles.****Required reading:**

Rodriguez-Pereyra, G. 2022. *Two arguments for the Identity of Indiscernibles*, Oxford: Oxford University Press. Chapter 5.

**Requirements:** Submit a paper of no more than 4000 words on any issue covered by the course. Deadline for submission: 13<sup>th</sup> October 2023.

**Grade Descriptors:**

Please refer to: [http://phil.arts.cuhk.edu.hk/~phidept/UG/Grade\\_descriptors.pdf](http://phil.arts.cuhk.edu.hk/~phidept/UG/Grade_descriptors.pdf)

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**Teaching Assistant:**

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**Academic honesty and plagiarism**

Attention is drawn to University policy and regulations on honesty in academic work, and to the disciplinary guidelines and procedures applicable to breaches of such policy and regulations. Details may be found at

<http://www.cuhk.edu.hk/policy/academichonesty/>

For assignments in the form of a computer-generated document that is principally text-based and submitted via VeriGuide, the statement, in the form of a receipt, will be issued by the system upon students' uploading of the soft copy of the assignment. Assignments without the receipt will not be graded by teachers. Only the final version of the assignment should be submitted via VeriGuide.