
When is Identity Qualitatively Grounded? A Phenomenological Contribution to the Absolute/Relative Identity Debate

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Résumé

The relative identity thesis implies that identity facts are grounded by qualitative criteria of identity, whereas absolute identity theorists deny the supervenience of identity on qualitative properties. I explore how the phenomenological tradition might contribute to this debate by addressing four junctures. The first juncture is the definition of qualitative and non-qualitative properties. I develop a context-dependent account by interpreting Husserl's distinction between constitutive determinations and principia individuationis: x is qualitative and y is extra-qualitative if y is a particular that individuates an instance of x . The second juncture is whether relative identity holds in some or all cases. I distinguish between entities that behave in a certain manner over their principles of individuation and those that fill the blank of their principles of individuation. Relative identity applies to the former and absolute identity applies to the latter. The third juncture is whether identity is a dyadic relation or a monadic property. I argue that behaving-over identity must be relational, whereas blank-filling identity is originally monadic. The behaving-over identity is where the non-tautological reflexivity of identity holds. The tautological sense of reflexivity is induced by the repeated use of a sign. Arguments against relative identity beg the question if they confuse two senses of reflexivity. The last juncture is the alleged alliance between vagueness and relative identity. It does not hold in general, but the idealized repeated use of a sign does create the impression that absolute identity applies to everything.

Mots-Clés: relative identity, qualitative properties, reflexivity, vagueness, phenomenology

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