

THE PRINCIPLE OF INESCAPABLE DETERMINACY

A Modal-Ontological Argument Against Absolute Non-Identity

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The Haimesian System

Final Polished Edition

Abstract

Can anything exist while possessing no identity, character, difference, structure, relation, or determinate status whatsoever? This paper argues that absolute indeterminacy is not merely difficult to imagine or describe; it cannot qualify as a genuine possibility. Every actual or possible condition must possess enough objective structure to differ from its nonoccurrence, impossibility, and alternatives. A purported condition that lacks every distinction cannot be identified as possible rather than impossible, present rather than absent, one possibility rather than another, or even as a condition at all.

The argument does not claim that reality must be completely definite, fully intelligible, classically consistent, permanent, or accessible to human thought. Partial indeterminacy, vagueness, contradiction, ineffability, transformation, and uncertain existence may all remain possible. It denies only **absolute indeterminacy**: the total absence of every determination whatsoever.

Whatever is real or genuinely possible must possess at least minimal modal-ontological determinacy. Absolute non-identity cannot exist or be possible, because a condition lacking every distinction cannot differ from there being no such condition.

1. The Problem

Every particular appears to exist according to some order. Blue is blue rather than red. A circle is a circle rather than a square. An event occurs in one manner rather than every possible manner. Even something vague or changing possesses enough character to be the vague or changing reality that it is.

Suppose, however, that one proposes: **Everything should become what it is not**. The proposal appears to prescribe a universal escape from identity. Yet it faces an immediate dilemma. If what each thing should become is specified, then the replacement possesses an identity of its own. Blue becomes red; order becomes disorder; existence becomes nonexistence. Each destination is determinate. If the replacement is not specified, then "what it is not" selects no particular outcome. Negation alone does not determine what should replace the original state.

To specify the alternative is to restore determinacy. To leave it unspecified is to identify no alternative at all.

The central insight is therefore not that everything must remain unchanged. It is that identity can be changed, contradicted, denied, replaced, or lost without reality thereby escaping all determinacy. Even the replacement, contradiction, loss, or indeterminacy must be determinate at some minimal level.

2. What the Argument Does Not Claim

The argument must not confuse determinacy with permanence, exactness, or complete description. It does not claim that every thing remains eternally unchanged, that every boundary is precise, that every proposition has a straightforward classical truth value, that reality contains no genuine vagueness, or that every existent is describable by human beings.

An entity may change almost every property it possesses. It may cease to exist. Its boundaries may be vague. Its continued identity may be indeterminate. It may be impossible for human beings to describe adequately. The argument makes only the following minimal claim: **whatever exists or is genuinely possible must possess enough structure to count as that existent or possibility rather than nothing, impossibility, or an entirely different condition.**

3. Four Forms of Determinacy

3.1 Qualitative determinacy

An object is qualitatively determinate when it definitely possesses a particular quality, such as being blue, round, conscious, or massive. The argument does not require complete qualitative determinacy.

$$F(x)$$

3.2 Numerical determinacy

An entity is numerically determinate when it counts as one entity rather than another. Some philosophers dispute whether numerical identity is always perfectly determinate; this paper need not resolve every such case.

$$x = x; \quad x \neq y$$

3.3 Propositional determinacy

A proposition is determinate when it possesses enough content to differ from other propositions and from the absence of any assertion. The negation of blue differs from the negation of round because the contents negated differ.

3.4 Modal-ontological determinacy

A purported reality or possibility is minimally modally determinate when it differs in at least one respect from its nonoccurrence, impossibility, alternatives, and the absence of any condition whatsoever. This is the level required by the present argument.

4. Partial Indeterminacy and Absolute Indeterminacy

Reality may be indeterminate in a particular respect. It may be indeterminate whether an object possesses a property, where its boundary lies, whether it persists through a change, or even whether a marginal entity exists. None of these possibilities entails the total absence of structure.

If it is indeterminate whether an object is red, the situation still concerns that object, redness, and the question of whether redness applies. If it is indeterminate whether an object exists, that very indeterminacy remains different from certainty, from a different existential question, and from the absence of every question. Indeterminacy must therefore be indeterminacy of something, concerning something, or within some field of alternatives.

Every possible indeterminacy must possess at least enough determinacy for it to be the particular indeterminacy that obtains.

5. Negation Is Determinate

Negation does not create an absolutely empty condition. The statement "the object is not blue" includes a subject, a property, a negating operation, and a denial of a particular relation. The negation of blueness differs from the negation of roundness because the contents negated differ.

It would be a mistake to say that not-blue is another form of blue. The correct formulation is that not-blue is a determinate exclusion, absence, or denial of blue. Negation may remove instantiation without removing every structural relation to the content negated.

Every intelligible or real negation must negate some determinate content and must itself differ from other negations and from no negation at all.

6. The Failure of Universal Non-Identity

Consider the universal prescription: **Everything should become what it is not.** Four interpretations are available.

First, each thing might be required to become every state it is not. A blue object would then need to become red and not red, physical and nonphysical, finite and infinite, existent and nonexistent. The prescription becomes contradictory.

Second, each thing might be required to become one unspecified contrary. But no particular condition is selected, so no criterion of fulfillment exists.

Third, each thing might be required to become one specified alternative. This is coherent, but it replaces one determinate state with another.

Fourth, each thing might be required to lose every identity, property, relation, structure, difference, and status. But then no resulting object or state remains identifiable. Nothing distinguishes fulfillment from annihilation, impossibility, or the absence of any transition.

The universal prescription fails through contradiction, underdetermination, determinate replacement, or elimination of the proposed result.

7. The Self-Application Defeat

Because the universal prescription applies to everything, it must apply to itself. If it remains unchanged, it violates its own command. If it becomes its negation, it cancels its universal authority. If it becomes an unrelated proposition, nothing in the command determines which replacement is correct. If it loses every determinate content, no proposition remains and there is no truth condition by which the transformation could count as successful.

A universal command that everything become what it is not cannot coherently govern itself.

8. The Missing Bridge

The preceding analysis establishes that absolute indeterminacy cannot be coherently represented as a determinate state. But this alone does not prove that absolute indeterminacy cannot exist. Reality may exceed human thought; something might exist even though no human mind could imagine or describe it.

The completed argument must therefore avoid the invalid inference from unthinkability to impossibility. It must show that absolute indeterminacy violates not merely the conditions of human representation, but the conditions under which anything can count as a genuine possibility.

9. The Modal Difference Principle

To say that a condition *S* is genuinely possible is to claim that reality could be such that *S* obtains. This claim necessarily distinguishes *S* obtaining from *S* not obtaining, possibility from impossibility, *S* from alternative conditions, and a reality containing *S* from the absence of any such condition.

A state that differs in no respect from its nonoccurrence cannot be a possible occurrence. This yields the central principle.

For any condition S to be genuinely possible, there must be some objective difference by which S's possible obtaining differs from its impossibility or nonobtaining.

$$\text{Poss}(S) \rightarrow \text{Diff}(S, \text{not-}S)$$

The relevant difference need not be causal, observable, spatial, or qualitative. It is the minimal modal contrast without which "possible" and "impossible" would no longer identify different statuses. If no distinction exists between *S* and not-*S*, then no competing modal conditions remain.

10. Why the Principle Is Not Merely Linguistic

The Modal Difference Principle does not depend on English, formal logic, or any particular cognitive architecture. Suppose no minds and no languages existed. Either an event could occur or it could not. If its possible occurrence were absolutely indistinguishable from its impossibility, there would be no modal difference between the two.

Possibility is inherently contrastive. To reject this principle, one would have to maintain that a condition may be genuinely possible even though there is absolutely no difference between its being possible and its being impossible. That does not identify an unfamiliar form of possibility; it abolishes the distinction that the term expresses.

11. The Principle of Objective Specification

A genuine possibility need not be completely describable, but it must possess enough objective structure to be the possibility it is rather than every other possibility or no possibility at all.

"Specification" here does not mean verbal description by a human being. It means objective modal differentiation.

An unknown particle may be possible without our knowing its properties. An ineffable divine reality may be possible without being expressible in ordinary concepts. An alien consciousness may be possible without being imaginable by human beings. Yet each must differ somehow from a different particle, no divine reality, unconsciousness, or impossibility. Otherwise nothing has been proposed as possible.

$$\text{Poss}(S) \rightarrow \text{Dm}(S)$$

12. Absolute Indeterminacy Defined

Let absolute indeterminacy mean the absence of every identity, distinction, property, relation, structure, boundary, logical status, modal status, and difference from all alternatives, including the difference between obtaining and not obtaining.

This is much stronger than vagueness, unknowability, contradiction, causal inertness, uncertain existence, or lack of a precise boundary. Absolute indeterminacy eliminates every fact by which a condition could differ from its nonoccurrence or impossibility.

$$A(S) \rightarrow \text{not-Dm}(S)$$

13. The Modal-Ontological Proof

Definitions

Genuine possibility: $\text{Poss}(S)$ means that reality could be such that S obtains.

Minimal modal determinacy: $\text{Dm}(S)$ means that S possesses enough objective structure to differ from its impossibility, nonoccurrence, and alternatives.

Absolute indeterminacy: $A(S)$ means that S lacks every determination and every difference from all alternatives, including the difference between obtaining and not obtaining.

Premises

Premise 1 - Possibility requires modal contrast. If S is genuinely possible, then its possible obtaining differs from its impossibility or nonobtaining.

Premise 2 - Modal contrast constitutes minimal determinacy. If S differs from its impossibility or nonobtaining, then S possesses minimal modal determinacy.

Premise 3 - Absolute indeterminacy excludes minimal determinacy. If S is absolutely indeterminate, then it possesses no minimal modal determinacy.

1. $\text{Poss}(S) \rightarrow \text{Diff}(S, \text{not-}S)$
2. $\text{Diff}(S, \text{not-}S) \rightarrow \text{Dm}(S)$
3. $A(S) \rightarrow \text{not-Dm}(S)$

Derivation

From Premises 1 and 2, if S is possible, then S has minimal modal determinacy. Assume for reductio that S is both possible and absolutely indeterminate. Possibility yields $Dm(S)$; absolute indeterminacy yields $\neg Dm(S)$. The conjunction is contradictory. Therefore no absolutely indeterminate condition is genuinely possible.

not exists S [$Poss(S)$ and $A(S)$]

Since actuality entails possibility, no absolutely indeterminate condition can be actual either.

$Actual(S) \rightarrow Poss(S)$

not exists S [$Actual(S)$ and $A(S)$]

14. Does the Argument Merely Define the Result?

The most serious objection is that absolute indeterminacy has been defined to exclude every determination, while possibility has been analyzed as requiring determination. The conclusion may therefore appear merely definitional.

The argument is partly constitutive, but not empty. Analysis often reveals that a seemingly coherent phrase combines incompatible commitments. "Married bachelor" does not describe a mysterious kind of person merely because its impossibility follows from the meanings involved. Likewise, "an absolutely indeterminate possibility" requires that some condition possess modal status while simultaneously eliminating every distinction by which modal status could obtain.

The proof is not an empirical discovery about an unknown object. It is a discovery about the necessary architecture of possibility. Its novelty lies in identifying the modal contrast that converts a semantic intuition about identity into a minimal ontological theorem.

15. Major Objections and Replies

15.1 Reality may outrun every concept

Reality may exceed human understanding. But if an alleged reality can truthfully be said to exist, it differs at least from there being no such reality. If no assertion whatsoever applies, it cannot be presented as an existing counterexample. The argument therefore does not reduce reality to thought; it distinguishes ineffability from total absence of modal status.

15.2 Reference may impose artificial identity

The proof does not infer that because we refer to a condition determinately, the condition is determinate. It argues that if the condition genuinely exists or is possible, its existence or possibility must differ from its absence or impossibility independently of our description.

15.3 Distinct things may be qualitatively indiscernible

The argument does not rely on the Identity of Indiscernibles. Two entities may share every qualitative feature. Yet if there are two rather than one, the multiplicity is part of what is the case. Absolutely difference-free plurality would remove even the numerical basis of the claim that there are two.

15.4 The argument assumes truthmakers

No substantial truthmaker theory is required. The argument needs only the distinction between possibility and impossibility. Even a deflationary theory of truth must preserve that difference if modal discourse is to state anything.

15.5 Contradictions may be real

A contradictory state remains structured. It includes particular propositions, their negations, and their joint obtaining. Paraconsistency therefore does not provide an example of absolute indeterminacy.

15.6 Ineffable realities may exist

Ineffability concerns the limits of expression, not the absence of every difference. An ineffable existent still differs from there being no such existent. The argument permits realities whose intrinsic character human concepts cannot capture.

15.7 Absolute indeterminacy may be nothingness

If absolute indeterminacy is identified with nothing whatsoever, it is no longer an existing entity or condition and therefore does not refute the conclusion. An empty world, by contrast, would still possess the determinate condition of containing no concrete objects.

16. The Assertibility Dilemma

The strongest radical objection proposes something beyond identity, difference, possibility, impossibility, existence, and nonexistence. It faces a dilemma. If the alleged absolute can be truthfully affirmed as real, it possesses at least the determination expressed by that affirmation. If no affirmation can truthfully apply, then it cannot be advanced as a counterexample.

This does not show that language captures every aspect of reality. It shows that a proposed counterexample cannot simultaneously be affirmed as real and denied every status by which that affirmation could be true.

Every coherent denial either depends upon the minimal determinacy it denies or ceases to express a denial at all.

17. The Strongest Sustainable Theorem

Every actual or genuinely possible condition must possess at least enough objective determinacy to differ from its nonoccurrence, impossibility, and alternatives.

Therefore, no absolutely indeterminate condition can be actual or possible.

Necessarily, for every S: [Actual(S) or Poss(S)] $\rightarrow$ Dm(S)

Necessarily, there is no S such that [Actual(S) or Poss(S)] and A(S)

This theorem is intentionally thin. It does not prove that reality is completely determinate, that classical logic governs every domain, or that all identities persist. It establishes only the minimum structure required for actuality and possibility to be distinguishable from their absence.

18. Philosophical Consequences

Absolute non-identity is impossible

An entity may cease to possess its former identity, but it cannot remain an existent while possessing no identity, relation, structure, or status whatsoever.

Every transformation is minimally determinate

A transformation may be unpredictable or vague, but there must still be a difference between the prior state, the transition, and the resulting condition.

Negation cannot serve as a complete ontology

To reject an order is not yet to specify its replacement. Once the replacement is specified, it becomes a positive structure subject to evaluation.

Indeterminacy presupposes a field

A thing cannot be indeterminate regarding absolutely everything while remaining a thing or situation. Indeterminacy requires some range, respect, or alternatives.

Possibility itself has structure

Possibility is not a featureless reservoir. A possibility must differ from impossibility and from alternative possibilities.

Complete metaphysical nihilism is unstable

The assertion that there is absolutely no identity, truth, structure, or distinction must retain enough structure to contradict itself or lose enough structure to cease asserting anything.

19. Relation to Earlier Philosophical Traditions

The argument belongs to a long philosophical lineage without merely repeating any single predecessor. Parmenidean reasoning treats nonbeing as resistant to thought and discourse. Aristotelian principles of identity and noncontradiction govern the intelligibility of predication. Hegelian determinate negation insists that negation is not an empty nothing but a structured transformation. Contemporary metaphysics distinguishes local or partial indeterminacy from total absence of structure.

The distinctive contribution of the present argument is the **modal bridge**: genuine possibility itself requires objective contrast with impossibility and nonoccurrence. This allows the argument to move beyond the weaker claim that absolute indeterminacy is indescribable and toward the stronger conclusion that it cannot qualify as a possible or actual condition.

20. Final Principles

The Principle of Inescapable Determinacy

Whatever exists, occurs, or is genuinely possible must possess at least minimal modal-ontological determinacy.

The Modal Difference Principle

A possible condition must differ from its impossibility and nonoccurrence. Where no such difference exists, no genuine possibility has been identified.

The Determinate-Indeterminacy Corollary

Every genuine indeterminacy must be determinate at least regarding the object, question, field, range, or respect in which it obtains.

The Principle of Determinate Negation

Every meaningful or real negation must negate some determinate content and must differ from other negations and from no negation at all.

The Replacement Corollary

Any specified transition into what something previously was not replaces one determinate condition with another rather than escaping determinacy.

The Universal Non-Identity Defeat

A universal prescription that everything become what it is not cannot coherently govern itself.

The Assertibility Dilemma

If absolute indeterminacy can be truthfully affirmed as real, it possesses at least the determination expressed by that affirmation. If no affirmation applies, it cannot function as a counterexample.

21. Conclusion

Reality may be stranger than human thought. It may contain entities beyond description, genuine vagueness, contradictions, uncertain boundaries, indeterminate identities, and forms of existence we cannot imagine. But strangeness is not absolute indeterminacy.

An ineffable reality still differs from no reality. A contradictory state still possesses the structure of contradiction. A vague object is vague in some respect. An indeterminate possibility remains the particular possibility whose status is indeterminate. A transformation still differs from the absence of transformation.

Absolute indeterminacy attempts to eliminate every distinction, including the distinctions between existence and nonexistence, possibility and impossibility, occurrence and nonoccurrence, this condition and every alternative, and something and nothing. Once every such distinction is eliminated, nothing remains that could count as the alleged condition.

Absolute non-identity is not merely indescribable. It is modally impossible. A condition with no difference from its own impossibility cannot be possible, and a reality with no difference from its own absence cannot be actual.

Things can lose what they were. They can become what they were not. They can become vague, contradictory, unknowable, or nonexistent. But they cannot escape every determination while remaining something.

That is the Principle of Inescapable Determinacy.

Appendix: Evaluation Within the Haimesian System

Current importance rating: 9.1/10. The argument addresses a foundational question: what must be true of anything merely for it to count as actual or possible? Its importance lies less in direct social policy than in its capacity to organize later work on identity, negation, nothingness, contradiction, vagueness, transformation, and the limits of metaphysical possibility.

Its strongest feature is the move from a conceptual observation to a modal-ontological theorem through the Modal Difference Principle. Its remaining limitation is deliberate: the theorem establishes only minimal determinacy, not complete determinacy. That restraint is essential to its defensibility.