ABSTRACT. In recent decades, a view of identity I call Sortalism has gained popularity. According to this view, if a is identical to b, then there is some sortal S such that a is the same S as b. Sortalism has typically been discussed with respect to the identity of objects. I argue that the motivations for Sortalism about object-identity apply equally well to event-identity. But Sortalism about event-identity poses a serious threat to the view that mental events are token identical to physical events: A particular mental event m is identical with a particular physical event p only if there is a sortal S such that m and p are both Ss. If there is no such sortal, the doctrine of token-identity is not true. I argue here that we have no good reason for thinking that there is any such sortal.

1. INTRODUCTION

Philosophers of Mind have long been concerned with the tenability of various forms of mind–body identity theory. It has seemed to some that unless some form of identity theory can be established, our ordinary ways of thinking about ourselves and our place in the world must be radically revised. With type- or property-identity theories long out of favor, however, the last best hope for identity theory is token-identity theory, to which much attention has been devoted over the last several decades. Even if mental properties are not identical to physical properties, the thought goes, one may still maintain that particular mental events are identical to particular physical events.

Despite the attention the doctrine of token-identity has received, its proponents and opponents alike have often failed to be properly circumspect in their treatment of identity-claims. A case in point: In recent decades, a view of identity – a view that I will call Sortalism – has gained popularity. We can loosely formulate this view as follows: According to Sortalists, if a is identical to b, then there is some sortal S such that a is the same S as b. I would exaggerate if I said that Sortalism has garnered a consensus among those who concern themselves with identity. Still, it is striking that so little effort has been made to understand how this view of identity challenges the doctrine of token-identity. If Sortalism is true, a
particular mental event m is identical with a particular physical event p only if there is a sortal S such that m and p are both Ss. If there is no such sortal, the doctrine of token-identity is not true. And yet, as I will argue here, we have no good reason for thinking that there is any such sortal.¹

In what follows, I flesh out this challenge to the doctrine of token-identity. I will begin, in section I, by laying out the case for Sortalism about object-identity. In Section 3, I will show that although events are ontologically distinctive in various ways, the same considerations that make Sortalism plausible about object-identity also make Sortalism plausible about event-identity. In Section 4, I will articulate more fully the challenge that Sortalism about event-identity poses for the doctrine of token-identity. There is, I will argue, only one plausible way of meeting this challenge: namely, by accepting the view that mental properties stand to physical properties as determinables to determinates. I will then consider Stephen Yablo’s important argument for this view. In Section 5, I will refute his argument and show that its failure results from the fact that Yablo does not properly appreciate certain distinctive and essential features of event-sortals. Physical properties do not determine mental properties. The Sortalist challenge to the doctrine of token-identity thus stands.

2. SORTALISM ABOUT OBJECT-IDENTITY

Objects and events have at least this much in common:

- **Particularity**: Objects² and events³ are particulars.
- **Countability**: Objects and events are countable.
- **Spatiotemporality**: Objects and events occupy space and time.⁴

To these platitudes, I think we ought to add another:

- **Sortability**: Objects and events fall into sorts or kinds.

In this section, I will make my way towards Sortalism about object-identity by first considering the significance of Sortability about objects: What does it mean to say that objects fall into kinds? In order to answer this question, it will help to distinguish between classes of properties and to make parallel distinctions between classes of general terms. Strawson distinguishes between material or stuff (e.g., gold, water), sortals, (e.g., chair, dog), and qualities (e.g., red, anger).⁵ Here, we will be concerned with the distinction between sortals and qualities.