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See also Cambridge Platonism; Common Sense Philosophy; Education, Philosophy of; Oxford Philosophy; Rationalism; Social Sciences

IDENTITY

In LOGIC, the law (or principle) of identity states simply: 'A is A'. Identity is thus the relation that holds between something and itself (and not between something and any other thing). Questions about identity are relevant to, but do not exhaust, questions about the much richer subject of PERSONAL IDENTITY. Though nearly all the philosophers mentioned in this article have contributed to discussions of personal identity, sometimes very substantially, philosophers such as Derek PARFIT, whose work is more distinctively in that area, are not discussed.

In logic, identity may be defined via the principle of the 'identity of indiscernibles' (sometimes known as 'Leibniz's Law'): if A and B have exactly the same properties, then they are identical. John McTaggart Ellis MCTAGGART's 'dissimilarity of the diverse' is akin to Leibniz's Law: if A and B are distinct then there is at least one property that A has and B does not, or vice versa. Identity may alternatively be introduced as a primitive relational idiom, in which case the converse principle, the 'indiscernibility of identicals', applies: if A is identical with B, then every property that A has B has, and vice versa.

Criteria of identity were often debated in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Thomas HOBBES proposed a puzzle that occupies philosophers to the present day:

> [I]f, for example, that ship of Theseus, concerning the difference whereof made by continued reparation in taking out the old planks and putting in new, […], were, after all the planks were changed, the same numerical ship it was at the beginning; and if some man had kept the old planks as they were taken out, and by putting them afterwards together in the same order, had made a ship of them, this, without doubt, had also been the same numerical ship with that which was at the beginning; and so there would have been two ships numerically the same, which is absurd. (*De Corpore*, p. 136)

Other important contributions came from John LOCKE, Joseph BUTLER, Thomas REID and David HUME. Locke claimed that identity does not depend on having the same atomic particles: '[A]n oak growing from a plant to a great tree and lopped, is still the same oak; and a colt grown up to a horse, sometimes fat, sometimes lean, is all the while the same horse' (*Essay*). Butler famously stated that everything is what it is and not another thing. Reid noted that 'wherever identity is real, it admits of no degrees' (*Essay on the Intellectual Powers of Man*, 1785). And Hume had a characteristically psychological take on questions about identity – 'We have a distinct idea of an object that remains invariable and uninterrupted through a supposed variation of time; and this idea we call that of identity or sameness' (*Treatise*) – though he had trouble accounting for the basis of the idea of identity in experience.

Debates about identity revived in the middle of the twentieth century, perhaps unsurprisingly in a period dominated by PHILOSOPHY OF LANGUAGE and logic. For the average person, to say that a thing is the same as itself appears to be trifling or silly. (Even W.V.O. Quine notably confesses in his *Methods of Logic* (1950): 'Of what use is the notion of identity if identifying an object with itself is trivial and identifying it with anything else is false?') In 'On Denoting', however, Bertrand RUSSELL suggested how certain identity statements can be both true and informative, by focusing upon statements such

as 'the author of *Waverly* = Scott,' in contrast to the uninformative 'Scott = Scott'. He declared, moreover, in his *Logic and Knowledge* (1956):

> When you say 'Scott is the author of *Waverley*', you are half-tempted to think there are two people, one of whom is Scott and the other the author of *Waverley*, and they happen to be the same. That is obviously absurd, but that is the sort of way one is always tempted to deal with identity.

E.J. Lemmon, as reported by Cartwright, pointed out that A = B may be true, even though A has an attribute which B has not. He had in mind what he termed a paradox of intensionality: '[T]he morning star, though it is the evening star, has the attribute of being necessarily the morning star, which the evening star does not have.' WITTGENSTEIN, moreover, claimed that the identity of indiscernibles disallows an option that involves no manifest incoherence at all: two objects having all their properties in common. Max BLACK studied an imaginary universe consisting only of two exactly resembling spheres – spheres which are qualitatively impossible to tell apart. It is suggested in such a completely symmetrical universe that the two spheres would be indiscernible. Contrariwise, Leibniz had taken the identity of indiscernibles for granted because he thought it followed from other parts of his METAPHYSICS. Indeed, in a letter to Samuel CLARKE, he had deduced the identity of indiscernibles from his Principle of Sufficient Reason.

Questions about conditions of identity are related to discussions of VAGUENESS (which saw important British contributions in the twentieth century). Gareth EVANS gave a formal but terse argument establishing a negative response to the question whether there can be a vague object corresponding to the singular term 'London', which does not single out a sharply circumscribed locale of England. He observed that if A is vaguely identical with B, then there is a fact about A – i.e. it is vaguely identical with B – that B fails to have. But then by Leibniz's Law, A is not identical with B.

Peter GEACH proposed that the notion of absolute identity has no merit and that there is only relative identity. He put the matter thus in his *Logic Matters* (1972): 'When one says "x is identical with y", this, I hold, is an incomplete expression; it is short for "x is the same A as y", where "A" represents some count noun understood from the context of utterance – or else, it is just a vague expression or a half-formed thought' (*Logic Matters*, p. 238).

David WIGGINS is without doubt the leading present-day theorist working on identity. In *Sameness and Substance Renewed* (2001) – in effect, a second edition of his earlier *Sameness and Substance* – Wiggins offers a *tour de force* concerning (personal) identity. The two books have comparable aims; they argue, for the most part against Geach, that identity is absolute. Wiggins nonetheless demonstrates that whenever A = B is true, there is a 'sortal' (a Lockean term) F such that A is the same F as B.

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ILLINGWORTH, John Richardson (1848–1915)

John Richardson Illingworth was born in London on 26 June 1848 and died in Longworth, Oxfordshire on 21 August 1915. He was the son of a prison chaplain in London, was educated at Corpus Christi College, Oxford, and became Fellow of Jesus College and tutor at Keble College at the same university in 1872. He was ordained priest in 1876. For reasons of health he withdrew from academic life to the rectory of Longworth, Oxfordshire, in 1883, where he remained for the rest of his life despite several offers of academic positions. He declined to give the GIFFORD LECTURES in 1902, but received an honorary doctorate of divinity from Edinburgh University in the same year. Illingworth became a member of the *Lux Mundi* group and contributed two essays to *Lux Mundi* in 1889.