

G. E. Moore

 The Early Essays

Edited by

Tom Regan

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*To my teachers,
Peter Heath and David Yalden-Thomson,
who introduced me to
Moore's philosophy*

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which proceeds from the contemplation of what we think to be most truly and perfectly good. We are indeed only entitled to think of this as what ought to be; not as what is or will be. But I doubt if this emotion need lose much of its force, because its object is not real. The effects of literature show how strongly we may be moved by the contemplation of ideal objects, of which we nevertheless do not assert the existence. It may indeed be doubted whether the most effective part in all religious belief has not always been similar to that which we have in objects of imagination—a belief quite consistent with a firm conviction that they are not facts. (2) And secondly, that some good objects should be real, is indeed necessary for our comfort. But these we have in plenty. It surely might be better to give up the search for a God whose existence is and remains undemonstrable, and to divert the feelings which the religious wish to spend on him, towards those of our own kind, who though perhaps less good than we can imagine God to be, are worthy of all the affections that we can feel; and whose help and sympathy are much more certainly real. We might perhaps with advantage worship the real creature a little more, and his hypothetical Creator a good deal less.


NOTES

1. A lecture delivered for the London School of Ethics and Social Philosophy.

2. Possibly the conception of the three Persons in the Athanasian Creed negates, or adds something contradictory to, part of what I have said. But I am concerned only with the manner in which most believers habitually think of God.

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Identity

 I am very anxious it should not be thought that the subject of this paper is of merely departmental interest. What I have to say is not addressed to those who are interested in any particular science, such as logic, definition, or psychology, but to all who are interested in the question what the world is. It appears to me that if what I shall say be true, most of those theories about the nature of the world, which are of the most general interest and which attract the most disciples for the various schools of philosophy, must be either false or purely chimerical. It is not, indeed, my object to show that these important consequences follow; it is possible that they do not, and I have not space to argue that they do. But I wish it should not be *assumed* that they do not. My own view is that, whether what I say be true or false, it is certainly very important, and that is my main reason for raising the question of its truth. What I most fear, then, is not that it should be proved to be false, but that it should be admitted true without enquiry, on the ground that, though true, it is unimportant. I fear that many of the doctrines I shall put forward will

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appear to be mere platitudes. They, or others very like them, are, I think, constantly so regarded; and yet those, who thus admit their truth, are not thereby prevented from holding other doctrines, on questions of far greater intrinsic importance, which flatly contradict these truths they admit and despise. That such a state of things is possible will scarcely be denied. For my own part I am convinced that the characteristic doctrines of most philosophers, no less where they agree than where they differ, are chiefly due to their failure to trace the consequences of admitted principles. To remember the [104] possibility that this may be so with the principles of identity, may, I hope, lend some interest to my discussion of the subject.

I will give an instance of the kind of purpose which I hope the discussion may serve. Considerable use is made now-a-days by a certain school of philosophical writers of the phrases "identity in difference" and "unity in difference." I do not know whether *as a rule* the two phrases are used in the same or in different senses; but certainly they are *often* used as if they were equivalent. The same is true, I think, of another pair of phrases, which are also much used by the same writers—namely, "individual" and "organic unity." Further, this second pair is, I believe, supposed to be connected with the first, in such a way, that if you know a thing to be an "individual" or "organic unity," you can always infer that it exhibits both "identity in difference" and "unity in difference"; and I should be very much surprised if, on examination, it did not also prove that the converse inference was very frequently made. Now I do not know that many people would regard the knowledge that they were "individuals" or that the world was an "organic unity" as having much importance in itself: although I think the phrases are vaguely impressive and convey the notion that anything to which they are applied must be of worth. But a very great derivative importance they certainly have; since the writers who use them draw conclusions by their means, which no one can regard with indifference.

Yet, what is meant by these phrases? In a sense it would seem plain that any complex thing whatever exhibits identity in difference, since it has at least two different predicates and yet is one and the same thing. But it is plain that no inferences of importance can be drawn from this fact, since the possession of complexity is compatible with almost every difference of quality we can think of. "Identity in difference" must, therefore, if it is to yield us valuable information, mean something other than mere complexity; and, as I shall show, there seem to be a great many other things it might mean. The phrase is [105] therefore ambiguous; and, though it is certain that many correct inferences can be drawn by means of ambiguous words, even where their special sense is not defined, it is no less certain that the gravest errors may be incurred by arguing that what is true of a thing to which such a word applies in one sense, is also true of that to which it applies in another. A philosopher certainly, although nothing can replace for him the power of recognising that the truths he handles are different, where they are so, and though this is perhaps his most valuable gift, cannot safely trust to that power alone if he wishes to go far, but must employ the additional safeguard of attempting to discover and fix in his mind the points wherein they differ. To a certain extent he may be helped in this task by the work of others, and to supply as much of this help as I am able, by discriminating the points of difference between truths which we express and must continue to express by the use of the word identity, is the object of this paper.

The first point to which I would call attention with regard to truths in which we assert identity is a very obvious one. It is that we may assert of two things that they have the same predicate, and yet are different from one another. Thus it is true that my coat is black, and also true that my waistcoat is black; and yet it is not true that my coat is the same as my waistcoat. This state of things does not at first sight appear to present any difficulty. It seems obvious enough that the two garments, though they have one

predicate in common, yet have each of them at least one other which is not shared by its fellow. And this, it may be said, is why they can have the same predicate: they have not a complete identity of content. But to say this is to imply a philosophical proposition of the very last importance, and one upon which there has never yet been agreement. It is to say that there cannot possibly be two things exactly alike. If the reason why my two coats are different is that they have different predicates, then, supposing all their predicates were the same, as their colour is, they [106] would not be two, but only one. But is it absolutely certain that there cannot be two things exactly alike? Put in this abstract form, it does not seem certain. If so—if there may be things exactly alike, which yet are two, why should not this be the case with the blackness also? Why should the blackness of both be one and the same, and not that of each a single blackness exactly like the other? There is, in fact, a real difficulty of deciding whether, in the case where two things have the same predicate, the predicates are two or only one. There is this real difficulty underlying the question which arises in Plato with regard to his “ideas,” whenever he says that they are *in* things or that things are copies of them. Can one and the same thing be in two places at once, or must there be two? The copy certainly is different both from the thing copied and from any other copy of the same. With regard to the third form in which he raises a difficulty—where, namely, he says that things partake of the idea—the difficulty is the same, if by “partake” be meant “have it as well as other qualities.” But it is entirely different if by “partake” be meant “have part of the idea.”

What the above discussion is designed to bring out is that, even when we assert truly that two things have the same or a common predicate, there is a serious difficulty in deciding exactly what it is that is true. Our first suggestion was that the predicate of each was in no sense different from that of the other, and that the two things differed from one another only in the sense that

they had different predicates. We may label this view as that which holds that no difference except *conceptual* difference is involved in two things having the same predicate. On this view when you say there are two things, you mean that they differ conceptually only, *i.e.*, it is impossible that the difference implied in duality should be other than conceptual difference. It follows that to talk of two things exactly alike, or with no conceptual difference, is to talk sheer nonsense—mere words. But so extreme a judgment seems open to [107] suspicion. Even if there are no two things exactly alike, it seems far from self-evident that there could not be. It was then suggested that there may be; and this view I propose to label as that which holds that beside conceptual difference there is also involved in two things having the same predicate, another kind which may be called *numerical* difference. But if we thus admit a separate kind of difference, compatible with the absence of conceptual difference, it is plain that this kind of difference may separate from one another not only the things, which we have said possess a common predicate, but also the predicates of each which we have hitherto said to be one and the same predicate. And hence our first view may be wrong not only in asserting that the two things differ from one another in one sense only, but also in asserting that the predicate of the one is in no sense different from that of the other. What really is the truth about this matter?

And, first: Is there such a thing as *numerical* difference, a different kind of difference from *conceptual* difference? Philosophers have commonly enough spoken as if there were. Even if it be asserted that two things which differ in the one way always also differ in the other, this is to assert that there are both kinds of difference. Thus, in so far as Leibniz deduces his principle of the Identity of Indiscernibles from the Law of Sufficient Reason, he is admitting that numerical and conceptual difference are different things. That any two things should differ numerically without also

differing conceptually cannot be a self-contradictory proposition, if it requires the Law of Sufficient Reason to prove it; and hence Leibniz is guilty of inconsistency, when he remarks that to suppose two things indiscernible is to suppose the same thing under different names.¹ Our question is, which of these two views is the right [108] one? Let us suppose that there is no such thing as numerical difference. In that case, when two things have the same predicate, the only difference between them consists in the difference between two different predicates, one of which belongs to one and the other to the other. But what are the *things* to which these different predicates belong? We predicate of the things both a common predicate, and a different predicate of each. Either then we must say that the things are the different predicates, and that it is to those that the common predicate belongs; or else we must say that the things are another pair of different predicates, to each of which one of the first pair and to both of which the common predicate belongs. But in either case the common predicate belongs to or is predicated of that which is different in each of the things. And when we say it has this relation of belonging or predication to each of two different things, we certainly may mean that it has the same relation to each of them. Accordingly our two must each be analysed into: (1) point of difference; (2) relation of predication; (3) common point; of which (2) and (3) are absolutely identical in each. But, if this is so, the things turn out to be merely their points of difference. Of the group (1) (2) (3), which is what we originally supposed to constitute a thing, nothing can be true except that they are three. We cannot say of (*a*) (2) (3), which is what we originally called the one thing, that it is different from the other (*b*)(2)(3). It is only (*a*) and (*b*) which differ from one another and are two. In fact our original supposition was that (3) could only be predicated of (*a*) and (*b*), not of anything else. And if this [109] supposition holds it is plain that anything else which we might try to predicate of the group, as such, would turn

out to be predicated only of (*a*) and (*b*). We can never by any possibility get a number of predicates to combine in forming a new thing, of which, as a whole, anything can be predicated. We must start, on this theory, with two points of difference—two simple predicates having conceptual difference from one another: this is essential to there being two things at all. And then we may try to form new things, also differing from one another, by finding predicates of these points of difference. But whatever we find and however many we add, we still leave the points of difference as they were—the only things of which duality can really be predicated. For anything we predicate of them, and the relation of predication itself, may always both belong to some other point of difference, so that every property by which we may try to distinguish our new thing from the old, will merely identify part of the new thing with something else, without producing any whole, which, as a whole, differs from everything else in the world, in the way in which our original points of difference differ from one another. We can never say, “This red differs from that red, in virtue of having a different position”; or “in virtue of having a different spatial relation to this other thing”; or “as being the one I think of now, whereas that was the one I thought of then.” The positions differ, the spatial relations differ, my thinking now differs from my thinking then; but it is always the same red which is at both positions, and is thought of at both times. And whenever we attempt to say anything of the red at this position, as, for instance, that it was surrounded by yellow, or that it led me to think of a soldier’s coat, exactly the same must be true of the red at the position, which was surrounded by blue or led me to think of a house on fire. We are unable to distinguish the two except by their relation to other things, and by whatever relations we attempt so to distinguish them we always find we have not succeeded. We can never say, “The red I mean is [110] the one surrounded by yellow, and not the one surrounded by blue.” For the

one surrounded by yellow is also surrounded by blue: they are not two but one, and whatever is true of that which is surrounded by yellow is also true of that which is surrounded by blue.

All this I regard as a *reductio ad absurdum* of the theory that there is no difference but conceptual difference. If any one can avoid assuming that something may be true of a quality at one position, which is not true of the same quality at another position, then he will be entitled to assert that all difference is conceptual difference. But this will at all events not be possible for those who hold that things conceptually the same may be distinguished by their relations to other things. If any one asserts or implies that a difference between this and that can be established by the fact that this is related to one thing whereas that is related to something different, he cannot without contradiction deny numerical difference. For this and that cannot have different relations, unless the relation possessed by the one is not possessed by the other. Unless, therefore, the one has a difference from the other over and above the difference of relations, it will be true of one and the same thing that it both has and has not a given relation to something else. And for the same reason it is equally impossible to assert that it is only the whole, this thing in that relation, which differs from the whole, the same thing in this other relation. For unless this which we call the same thing is in some sense two things, it has *both* relations, and everything which is true of the thing with the one relation will also be true of the thing with the other. It cannot be true that the whole formed of the thing in one relation is different from the whole formed of it in the other, unless the thing itself is different; although that it should have the one relation might be a different truth from its having the other.

I conclude then that there is such a thing as numerical difference, different from conceptual difference. And since [111] this result has been obtained by pointing out truths in which a thing conceptually the same is said both to have and not to have a

given relation to something else, we have also answered a second question, and have shown that there not only may be but are things exactly similar; and further, since the things, which turned out to be so, were instances of what we originally took to be a common predicate of two different things, it is also plain that a common predicate, in its application to one thing, may differ numerically from the same predicate in its application to another. We have therefore refuted the principle of the Identity of Indiscernibles in both the forms which Leibniz failed to distinguish. We have found both (1) that Identity is not conceptually identical with Indiscernibility; there is a difference not only in name but in fact; and (2) that things which are indiscernible are not always identical. On the other hand, we have accepted the principle frequently implied in Plato that the idea in a thing may be different from the idea in itself; and we have still to see whether there is any insurmountable objection to this view.

The view we have accepted is that in some cases where two things are truly said to have a common predicate, there exists in each a predicate exactly similar to that which exists in the other, but not numerically identical with it. And I confess I see no objections to this view, except what seem to rest on a bare denial of the difference between conceptual and numerical difference. These two exactly similar things are, I may be told, identical in content: exact similarity means identity in content. I admit that they are so. In that case, my adversary may retort, they are the same thing; there is no difference between them; they are not two but one. But this is merely to beg the point at issue. What I have urged is that many of our judgments plainly imply that there may be *two* things, things having a kind of difference which I call numerical, which yet have not another kind of difference which I call conceptual. And I explain the phrase, identity of content, as applying only [112] to two such things, which have no conceptual difference. The two things, are, I admit, in one sense the same; but

that they are not therefore also *one* and the same is just what I have tried to show.

Or, again, it may be urged:—Does not this identity of content between the things consist in their both having the same predicate—a common element? But, if so, then, on your view, this common predicate would itself be two; and these two predicates would again need a common element to explain their identity of content, which would again be two, and so on *ad infinitum*. So that, if you once admit a single pair of exactly similar things, for each pair thus admitted you have to admit an infinite number of other pairs. And (it may be added) if this is not absurd enough, each pair will be entirely indistinguishable from all the others, so that you will not even be able to distinguish your first pair as your first, from those which it implies. To such an objection I should answer: (1) That the pairs will not on my view be indistinguishable. Each member will differ *numerically* from the rest, and where this is the case any two, of an infinite number, may be distinguished as this and that, since it is the very meaning of numerical difference that things which have it are thus different and need not be mistaken for one another. And (2) if this is the case, I see no absurdity in the infinite regress. There may, for all I know, be an infinite number of exactly similar things; but if we can distinguish what is true of any one, from what is true of any of the rest, I see nothing to refute me in the suggestion. It is at all events true, that, if there is not an infinite number of exactly similar things, there is an infinite number of conceptually different ones. So that, even, if the admission of an infinite implies, as some hold, a contradiction, this fact cannot be urged in favour of conceptual as against numerical difference. But (3) even if the last two objections were unanswerable, they do not touch my theory. For I do not hold that in *every* [113] case, where a common predicate is truly asserted, the predicates are two. I found myself forced to maintain that in some cases they were so. But it seems to me that, as a matter of fact,

wherever two predicates are exactly similar, their relation to that which is the same in each of them, is quite different from the relation of each to that of which it is the predicate. That there may be said to be in each an identical element I admit. But this identical element appears to me to be not only the same, but also *one and the same*. Nor, in default of further objections, do I see any reason for thinking that it cannot be so.

But, lastly, it may be said: If in the case of two exactly similar things there is always also a third thing, as you have just admitted, which is *one and the same* and different from either, must there not also be a fourth related to the first and third, as the third is related to the first and second; and a fifth related to the second and third in the same way, and so on *ad infinitum*? In other words, if, as Plato would say, the similarity between two particulars is to be explained by the similarity of both to one and the same idea, must not the same explanation be given of the similarity of each to this idea? To this objection again I should reply, in the first place, that a mere infinity of numerically identical things does not appear to me to be impossible. But if, as seems to be implied in the second form of words, the objection is not to this infinity but to a definition of exact similarity which consists in saying that two things are exactly similar to one another when each is exactly similar to a third thing, then I admit that such a definition is invalid. Certainly if the relation of the idea to each of its particulars were exactly the same as their relation to one another, we could not define their relation to one another by means of their relation to it. We should have to admit that exact similarity was an unanalysable relation, and that ideas, even though there might be infinite numbers of them, were superfluous hypotheses so [114] far as it was concerned, and could not be inferred from its reality. And this objection does not, as did the last, fail altogether to touch my theory; for I did intend to *define* the relation of exact similarity between two things as involving relation to a third thing,

and not merely to make the gratuitous and irrelevant assertion that, whenever two things are exactly similar, there is also such a third thing. To meet this objection, then, I must assert, what has not been made plain hitherto, that the relation between the idea and its particular is *not* the same as that of one particular to the other: that the idea is not exactly similar to its particular. And this assertion does, I admit, seem strange at first sight. If they are not exactly similar, what, it may be asked, is the difference between them? We grant you they have numerical difference, but you yourself admit that they have no conceptual difference, and what more than this can be meant by exact similarity? My answer is that something more than this is meant by exact similarity, namely, the fact that each of the things said so to be has a peculiar relation to a third thing, numerically but not conceptually different from them, which they have not to one another. This third thing is the Platonic idea, or, as we may now call it, the universal. And this third thing is not exactly similar to either of the particulars, just because there is no fourth thing to which it has the relation which they have to it. To this view of the case I can discover no further objection. It is true it would be desirable to have some single term to express the fact that the universal differs numerically from the particular, without differing conceptually from it, although it has not that further relation to which I have just confined the term exact similarity. The term exact similarity might, indeed, be used for this purpose. But then it would be necessary to have another term to express the additional fact that each particular is also related to the other through the universal; and since the relation of particular to particular is probably far more often [115] spoken of under this name, and is also far more often an object of discussion, it seems desirable to employ the familiar term with this complex meaning. How any term is to be used is not, however, the question in which I am mainly interested at present. The point upon which I am concerned to insist is that the relation of a

particular to its universal is, in fact, different from that of a particular to a particular, which would commonly be said to be exactly similar to it, although of both pairs it is true that they differ numerically without differing conceptually. This point appears to me necessary if we once admit, as I have tried to show we must, that things do differ numerically without differing conceptually. For this theory threatened to obliterate the distinction between particulars and universals, since it denied that any distinction could be found in the fact that the particular was the universal in relation to some other or others conceptually different from it. Whereas it seems impossible to deny that universals do differ from particulars, since different things are true of them: as, for instance, that particulars certainly exist, while it is at least doubtful whether any universals do; and that universals may be predicated of particulars, while particulars cannot be predicated of universals nor yet of one another. Thus it seems certain that this red and that red do exist, but very doubtful whether redness itself does. And equally certain that this red is red; whereas undoubtedly red itself is not this red, nor this red that red. I can thus claim for my theory, that it partially unites the views of those who insist on the reality of self-identical universals, but feel themselves therefore bound to deny any difference but difference of content, with the views of those who maintain exact similarity of particulars, but feel inclined to deny that any identity, save that of each particular with itself, is involved in this.

The admission of numerical difference seems, then, to be necessary; and we have failed to find any fatal objections to it. It has, however, become plain that several important [116] consequences, not generally recognised, follow from its admission; and it will now be well to sum these up.

First, then, any two things of which one has a relation which the other has not, or of one of which something is true which is not true of the other, are numerically different from one another.

But all such pairs of things are divided into two classes, according as the pair in question also have another difference called conceptual difference or have not. It is impossible to escape the conclusion that one and the same pair may have both kinds of difference. For if it be said that by their conceptual difference is merely meant that a conceptually different universal is related to each; then each may indeed differ numerically only from the other, but must differ conceptually from the universal to which it is related. But this universal has to it a relation which it has not to the other. Accordingly by definition the universal is numerically different from it; and since it is also conceptually different, we have one and the same pair possessing both kinds of difference. To proceed: Any two universals have both numerical and conceptual difference from one another. But every particular has some one universal from which it differs numerically only. To this universal it also has a peculiar nameless relation, which the universal has not to it, and which it has not to any other particular. All particulars which have this relation to the same universal differ from one another numerically only; but they differ conceptually also from any particular which has this relation to a different universal. This nameless relation which each particular has to one, and only one, universal, is not the same as the relation of a member of a class to its class-concept; since the member of a class may differ conceptually from its class-concept, and since also two universals may both belong to the same class. But, it may be said, what is the difference between a particular and a universal, since they do not necessarily differ conceptually? The difference is that they belong to different classes: the class-concept "universal" differs from [117] the class-concept "particular." And the classes may be defined as follows: Anything is a particular which has to some other things, differing from it numerically only, the peculiar nameless relation above mentioned. Anything is a universal which has this relation to nothing else at all. Thus there may be universals having only one

particular, or having no particulars whatsoever: but every particular must have a universal. The name "universal" must not therefore be understood to imply particulars, but only to note the fact, that if there be more than two things differing from one another numerically only, there is one among them having a relation to *all* the rest, which none of the rest have to it or to one another. A class-concept, on the other hand, does imply at least one *member* conceptually different from it; and if there are more, it has to *all* a relation which none of them have to it or to one another. It is, moreover, always also a universal, but may have no particulars. Great care is therefore needed in distinguishing the different relations it may have to different things in either character.

We are now in a position to say something with regard to the meaning of identity. With regard to assertions of identity in general, it seems plain that they may take two different forms. We may either assert that this is identical with that, or that this is identical with itself. The latter form is that used in the logical "Law of Identity," A is A; everything is identical with itself. Of this law Hegel complains in one place² that those who assert it also assert its "opposite," and immediately afterwards, that utterances in accordance with it "deserve" to be "reputed silly." I cannot take upon myself to decide whether or not he regards these charges as the same, and whether or not he means by opposite "contradictory." The instances he gives ("A planet is—a planet; Magnetism is—magnetism; Mind is—mind") seem to be justly accused of silliness. But are they untrue? I do not know that either he [118] or any of his disciples have maintained that Mind is not mind, although they may have maintained that Matter is not matter. It would seem, then, that some even of these silly instances have contradictories, which are false; and that when Hegel tells us that in asserting the Law of Identity we also assert its opposite, he only means that we must assert something else of Mind as well as the fact that it is Mind; not that we may assert it is not Mind.

Accordingly, his first complaint would seem to amount to no more than a comment on the ambiguity of the copula, pointing out that many different things may in different senses be predicated of one and the same thing; a comment which is very true, and would be very useful if those who made it, or those who heard it, could be induced thereby to remember it in practice.

But there still seems room to ask why these remarks are silly if they are true. I think, in the first place, it is because the same word happens to be used in subject and predicate. It is true, as Hegel himself remarks, that the propositional form always "promises a distinction between subject and predicate," and if a distinction is meant, it usually seems silly to use the same symbol for what is meant to be distinguished. Cases are rare in which the double meaning of a symbol is so well understood that we can calculate upon a distinction being perceived in spite of our using the same symbol. We cannot enunciate all truths in the form of puns; and, even if we could, we could not expect the joke to be appreciated in all companies. "A bull is a bull" might conceivably be the best way of expressing a judgment of the relation between such very different things as an animal and an Irish form of wit; but the difference must be very obvious, or we shall have to explain our joke. Hegel is, therefore, unfair to the Law of Identity in his choice of symbols to express its instances. Supposing we say, "Mind is something of which propositions are true which are not true of anything else whatever," it is by no means obvious that the utterance is silly, although our meaning might [119] be exactly the same as we should express under other circumstances by saying, "Mind is mind." But what is our meaning when we use such expressions? I have assumed that there must be some distinction which we are trying to express; but it is obvious, from the fact that we are ever tempted to express it by "Mind is mind," that it is a distinction which is somewhat difficult to catch. When we say, "This is identical with itself," the truth of which we are think-

ing seems to belong to the class of truths of which the general form is, "This is identical with that," and it seems as if in all such cases "this" and "that" must have some difference from one another, and therefore that, in this case, the thing must be different from itself in order to be identical. This, I believe, is the conclusion to which Hegel wishes to drive us; and yet it is undoubtedly this which the Law of Identity wishes to deny. We must, therefore, find a point of difference between what we mean by "This is identical with itself," and what we mean by "This is identical with that," if we are to hold that any instance of our Law does not imply its own contradictory; and yet we must maintain that any such instance asserts a relation between two different things, if we are to hold that it is not pure nonsense and can have a contradictory.

Such a point of difference may be found, in the first place, in the fact that when we say, "Mind is self-identical," we are asserting something of it which is also true of everything else; whereas when we say, "Matter is identical with mind," we are asserting something of a pair of things, which is not true of every other pair. In short our Law is: "Everything is self-identical"; it is not "Everything is identical with something else." It would thus seem, at first sight, that "Mind is mind" is as far as possible from being an instance of our Law, or an "utterance in accordance with it," since it appears to be an attempt to assert of mind something which is true of nothing else, whereas, by the very terms of the law, any instance of it must assert of something a predicate which is also true of [120] everything else. The Law of Identity asserts of everything that it belongs to a certain class: let us say, the class of subjects. An instance of the law would then be: "Mind is a subject." But, then, so are "matter" and hosts of other things. Yet we do not mean to assert that it is just like these: we feel that our assertion was meant to be unique. We want to say not only that it is a subject like other things, but *which* subject it is; and we

are familiar with only one method of specification—that which asserts of a given particular the universal to which it is related. When we say, vaguely enough, but with a very definite meaning, “This exists,” and we are asked “Which *this* do you mean?” the answer “The *this* which is red” generally proves satisfactory: we have succeeded in specifying a point wherein it differs from most other things. But when the “*this*” of which we are speaking is “This red” or is the universal itself, this method is no longer open to us. We cannot specify any point in which it differs from other things, because it is itself a mere point of difference. We can say of it, it is a subject, a point of difference: and we are sure that this is unambiguous. But if any one asks, “Which subject is it?” we can only reply, “The subject which it is,” although we have thereby added nothing to our meaning. This, I take it, is how we come to say “Mind is mind.” We fancy that the uniqueness of a thing ought in every case to be capable of being expressed in some predicate, because this method proves successful in most ordinary cases. But the fact is that every predicate we can assign does also belong to some other thing, though not in general to all or most; and that the only thing which gives absolute uniqueness to any proposition is the subject. Any proposition will differ from some other in respect both of its subject and its predicate; but it can differ from all others only in respect of its subject.

If then we take our meaning, when we say “Mind is mind,” to be that “Mind is a subject,” is it still silly? Certainly this [121] particular case of the Law of Identity may be thought so; and so, under certain circumstances, may the other: for the facts they enunciate are often obvious to every one. But the Law itself does not therefore lose its importance. For it asserts that this is true of everything; whereas every philosopher who holds that Appearance differs from Reality must assert that some things are mere predicates.

The first meaning, then, which we can give to an assertion of

Identity, is that the assertion that a thing is identical with itself is equivalent to the assertion that it is a subject. Identity is not here a relation between two things, nor does it imply any difference. The assertion that such and such a thing is a subject has been common enough in philosophy, and therefore might seem to need no explanation. Moreover, the notion “subject” is itself a subject, and therefore undefinable. I may, however, attempt to convey a notion of its meaning by specifying its relations, and by recalling the terms which have been used for it. To begin with the latter: It is, in the first place, much what Spinoza meant by Substance; and his “Attribute,” too, is much what I mean by predicate. It is much what is commonly meant by “Individual,” and it is what Mr. Bradley and others have called a “This.” Now what is intended to be conveyed by predicating any of these terms of a thing—by saying that so and so is a Substance or a Subject, or an Individual, or a “This”—appears to be mainly that the thing so said to be is a thing of which something is true which is not true of anything else whatever. But if this be taken to mean a thing which has a predicate which nothing else has, the search for such a thing obviously becomes very difficult. Hence arises a tendency to suppose that a substance must be a thing with a very great variety of predicates; since, if you assign it enough, there is some hope that there will be no other thing of which it is true that it has all those predicates. In this way we obtain such definitions of Substance as that it is that which unites all positive predicates; [122] or of an Individual, as that it combines the greatest possible differentiation with the greatest possible unity. But all such attempts leave unexplained the fact, which they cannot but recognise, that the predicates themselves, if they are different, must each have that very property, which their combination is supposed to bestow on Substance—namely, that something is true of each, which is not true of anything else. Either they are not each unique; in which case the Substance also has lost its uniqueness: or else they are;

and then the collection of any number is no whit more so than each one singly. It is not then by its predicates that a Substance can be distinguished. Something is true of it which is not true of anything else, but this cannot mean that it has either one or any number of predicates which nothing else has. There is in fact an ambiguity in the expression, "that which is true of a thing," to point out which is all that I can do in the way of defining a subject. It is the case with any subject, not only that something is true of it, which is true of nothing else, but that everything which is true of it is true of nothing else. But this does not mean that it may not have the same relation to other things which something else has; it may and must have some relation to some other thing, which everything else has. What is meant is that the fact of its having that relation is not the same fact as that anything else has it. That it is a subject, for instance, is a different truth from the truth that anything else is so, although what each asserts to be true of the subject in question is exactly the same.

(1) Our first kind of "Identity," then—self-sameness or individuality—neither affirms nor denies difference. It is true that if two things are numerically different, each is an individual. But to assert that a thing is not an individual is not equivalent to asserting that it is not numerically different from some other. Numerical difference can only be asserted or denied of two individuals; individuality can be asserted or denied of one. The motive of both denials is indeed the same, [123] namely, the desire to prove that a single individual possesses both of two predicates, of which it is obvious that it possesses one. But whereas the denial of numerical difference would leave it doubtful which of the two was to be benefited, the denial of individuality makes it plain that the advantages of the transaction are not to accrue to that of which it is denied. Thus, for instance, in order to prove a Spiritualism by transferring to mind some of the predicates which appear to attach to matter, it is necessary both to deny their numerical dif-

ference (which by itself might lead to Materialism), and also to deny the individuality of matter (which by itself might lead to Agnosticism).

(2) The above combination of these two denials gives us a second sense of identity. A thing may be said to be numerically identical with another, when it is denied both to have individuality and to be numerically different from that other. An assertion of identity in this sense is obviously never true; just because an assertion of it in the first sense always is so. Neither the denial of individuality nor the denial of numerical difference is ever true. Yet both are frequently denied. The reason seems to be that we frequently wish to assert that two relations both attach to one individual. In such cases the truth that the one relation attaches to the individual is a different truth from the truth that the other attaches to it; and since the truths are different it is assumed that they have different subjects. Thus the difference between truths which consists in their asserting different relations of the same subject is confused with that which consists in their asserting the same relation of different subjects. Thus, if we say, "The red I am thinking of now is the same as that of which I was thinking then," it is easy to suppose that the identity predicated is of the same kind as when we say, "The red at this place is the same as the red at that place." In the second case, however, we are asserting that two things numerically different have the same relation to one universal (a particular tint of red), whereas [124] in the first we may be merely predicating two different relations of a single individual. When once, in this way, we have come to suppose that we can deny of a thing that it differs numerically from itself, it is comparatively easy to persuade ourselves that the denial may extend to other things.

But (3) we may deny conceptual difference of two things numerically different. We may then be said to assert that they are conceptually identical. In all such cases the assertion of identity is

the assertion of a relation between two different things: identity does really imply difference. The relation asserted may, according to what was said above, be either the relation of two particulars to the same universal, or the relation of the universal to a particular, or that of a particular to a universal. All three relations are different, but all are alike in implying the denial of conceptual difference. It is plain that in such cases it is very easy to suppose that, since we assert identity in spite of numerical difference, we are also denying numerical difference. And if numerical difference could be denied in the case of conceptual identicals, there would be no objection to its denial in the case of things conceptually different, since they are not a bit more numerically different than the others. Moreover

(4) Things which are both conceptually and numerically different from one another frequently have to one another a relation which is very liable to be confused with the relation of particular to particular: I mean the relation of members of a class to one another. If a number of reds of the same tint are said to have in common the fact that they are all just that red, we are liable to suppose that a number of reds of different tints also have in common in the same way the fact that they are all red. If the first set may be said to exhibit identity of content, why not the second? And if the second, why not the series of numbers, &c.? It must, I think, be admitted that 2 and 3 are sometimes said to exhibit identity in difference for no better reason than that they are both numbers. It is thought that [125] their being numbers enters into their nature as individuals, in the same way as its redness constitutes the nature of "this red." Yet it must be insisted that 2 and 3 are *not* conceptually identical. Their relation to number is quite different from that of two particulars to their universal. Though this, therefore, is a case in which identity is predicated, I think the usage is one which might well be given up. The confusion caused by it is largely responsible for that conception of "concrete" or

"self-differentiating" "universal," which is so powerful an instrument for persuading to the denial of numerical difference between individuals. If the conception "number" be regarded as having to the different numbers the relation of a universal to its particulars, then, in virtue of their difference, it is called a "self-differentiating universal." Moreover, the number "two," in virtue of its relation to it, may be called a (partially) concrete universal. And further, since it is very easy to confound the class-concept with the class, why should not the whole series of numbers (if only it were not infinite!) be regarded as a self-differentiating or concrete universal? (I do not know which expression, or whether either, would be considered appropriate in this instance.) And, lastly, since here we have a group of different things, each with an intimate relation to one common concept, with regard to which the identity in difference characteristic of a concrete universal is so remarkable, why should we not, wherever we have a group of different things, each of which is related to one common concept, even if that common concept be only their membership of the group, call that group, too, a concrete universal? Hence a state is a concrete universal, a man is a concrete universal; not because states and men have some properties in common, nor even because all the parts of each is a member of a single class, but because of each of the parts of each it may be said that it is a member of the state, a part of man. Such extravagances are quite soberly committed by philosophers of reputation. But the main pity of it is that, when they have thus invested a [126] group with the title of concrete universal or individual (perhaps these are the same?), then they hark back to begin to invest the group with the properties which belong to a real universal: as that, without their relation to the universal, the particulars would not be what they are; that the group, as a whole, possesses all the attributes which its particulars have singly; that they, conversely, possess all its attributes—are microcosms to its macrocosm. By such methods it is easy to prove

that the world is an individual; that all differences are transcended in it; that its capability of remaining one, in spite of them, is admirable.

But to return: (5) If two things numerically different may be conceptually the same, may not two things conceptually different be numerically the same? The answer has been already given: no two things can be numerically the same. But the question introduces us to the last meaning of identity which I intend to consider—that, namely, in which identity is predicated of complex things. The case of complex things is one in which those who are, in general, most anxious to deny that there is such a thing as numerical difference, have strenuously maintained it. Their very doctrine is that conceptual difference is compatible with numerical identity. They wish to maintain that a thing may be the same with itself (that foolish proposition, “Mind is mind”), in spite of having different predicates; and that because they hold that the subject is constituted by its predicates. The first question to be answered under this head is: Can a collection be an individual? It certainly may present points of resemblance to one. Thus we can predicate things of a number of parts, which are different truths from any that can be predicated of each by itself; as that they are so many, or that they have such a shape. Moreover, we have already admitted that one kind of complex thing, a truth, may, as a whole, be numerically different from another; and where two truths assert the same predicate of things conceptually the same, they may even be [127] conceptually identical. Complexes are then capable of being subjects, both as wholes, and also in that certain predicates attach to all their parts which do not attach to each singly. But it is very important to distinguish these cases from those in which a mere relation between the parts is asserted. Thus, when I say that my coat is black, I may be understood to assert that, if not all, yet a great number of, its parts are so. But the assertion that each one of them is black is not to be understood as

an assertion of the relation of particulars to a universal, but of black particulars to other particulars. Accordingly, when it is asserted of one of them that it is black and woollen, this is not to be understood as an assertion that one individual has two predicates, but that two individuals have a certain relation. The parts of my coat, then, understood in this sense, have neither conceptual nor numerical identity. In each case it is possible to distinguish some one individual related to a conceptually different individual; and it is these relations which are asserted when all are said to be black. The assertion of identity through change, and of personal identity, always involves relations of this kind. When the same identical thing is said to persist, it is always meant that two or more particulars, conceptually identical, are continuous in time; and the change resolves itself into the fact that each of two conceptually different particulars has the same relation to each at a different time. Thus the “material identity” of a thing may be said to consist in the continuous existence of conceptually identical particulars, which have at different times the same relation to different particulars.


NOTES

1. This point does not appear to have been noticed by Mr. Russell in his intricate discussion of Leibniz's principle (*Philos. of L.*, pp. 54–56). If Leibniz is to be held to his remark, his doctrine is indistinguishable from that which Mr. Russell attributes to Mr. Bradley. In any case, the fact that he made it proves that he was not always clear as to the meaning of his principle. And the same conclusion follows from the fact that, if he allows numerical difference to differ from conceptual difference, he is also bound, in consistency with another application of the Law of Sufficient Reason, to hold that the world does not exist (*ib.*, p. 57), since there must for each thing in it be something *conceivable* differing from that thing numerically only.

2. *Smaller Logic*, § 115, Wallace's Trans., p. 214.

5

The Value of Religion¹

 It is, I think, well known that a great many people nowadays believe in God. And it is also known that many people do not believe that any God exists. Each party, the believers and the unbelievers, the Christian and the infidel, does know in general that the other party numbers many members. Some time ago there was not little public controversy between these factions. Bradlaugh and Huxley, to mention well-known names, assaulted the believers very vigorously, and Matthew Arnold did his best to arbitrate. At present the question whether God exists or not, seems to have ceased to be of public interest. Books are, no doubt, still published on both sides of the question, Huxley and Matthew Arnold are still read; but in general neither side seems very anxious to convince the other. I doubt if the Christians ever think how many infidels there are. And the infidels, on their side, have ceased to question equally the right of other people to believe and their own right to disbelieve. In general no unpleasantness arises from this great difference of opinion: you do not even know whether your neighbor is a Christian or an infidel; you see no reason to inquire, even if the question should occur to you.

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