

SAMENESS AND SUBSTANCE RENEWED

In this book, which thoroughly revises and greatly expands his classic work *Sameness and Substance* (1980), David Wiggins retrieves and refurbishes in the light of twentieth-century logic and logical theory certain conceptions of identity, of substance and of persistence through change that philosophy inherits from its past. In this new version, he vindicates the absoluteness, necessity, determinateness and all or nothing character of identity against rival conceptions. He defends a form of essentialism that he calls individuatve essentialism, and then a form of realism that he calls conceptualist realism, a position he seeks to place in relation to one surviving insight of idealism. In a final chapter, he advocates a human being based conception of the identity and individuation of persons, arguing that any satisfactory account of personal memory must enforce and follow through all the normative requirements that flow from its logically inalienable aspiration to furnish direct knowledge of the rememberer's own past. This important book will appeal to a wide range of readers in metaphysics, philosophical logic, and analytic philosophy.

DAVID WIGGINS is Wykeham Professor of Logic Emeritus in the University of Oxford, Fellow of the British Academy, and Foreign Honorary Member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. His publications include *Needs, Values, Truth: Essays in the Philosophy of Value* (1987) and many journal articles.

Cambridge University Press
0521454115 - Sameness and Substance Renewed
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CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

Cambridge University Press
 0521454115 - Sameness and Substance Renewed
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 Frontmatter
[More information](#)

PUBLISHED BY THE PRESS SYNDICATE OF THE UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE
 The Pitt Building, Trumpington Street, Cambridge, United Kingdom

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS
 The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge CB2 2RU, UK
 40 West 20th Street, New York, NY 10011-4211, USA
 10 Stamford Road, Oakleigh, VIC 3166, Australia
 Ruiz de Alarcón 13, 28014 Madrid, Spain
 Dock House, The Waterfront, Cape Town 8001, South Africa
<http://www.cambridge.org>

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First published 2001

Printed in the United Kingdom at the University Press, Cambridge

Typeface Baskerville MT 11/12.5 pt. *System* QuarkXPress™ [SE]

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloguing in Publication data

Wiggins, David.

Sameness and substance renewed / David Wiggins.
 p. cm.

Rev. edn of *Sameness and substance*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1980.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 0 521 45411 5 (hardback) – ISBN 0 521 45619 3 (paperback)

1. Identity. 2. Individuation (Philosophy). 3. Essence (Philosophy). 4. Conceptualism. 5.
 Substance (Philosophy). I. Wiggins, David. Sameness and substance. II. Title.

BD236.W53 2001

110-dc21 00-065152

ISBN 0 521 45411 5 hardback

ISBN 0 521 45619 3 paperback

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Cambridge University Press
0521454115 - Sameness and Substance Renewed
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Preface

When *Sameness and Substance* (Blackwell, 1980) went out of print, Cambridge University Press agreed to take over the book. They suggested that the Longer Notes be dropped and certain smaller matters be attended to in recognition of what has happened since 1979. They urged that the chapter about personal identity be superseded. In the process of my discovering how just and sensible these proposals were, then forming the resolve to follow the substance theory through more single-mindedly and to a greater distance, there came into being the version I have called *Sameness and Substance Renewed*.

Whether *Sameness and Substance Renewed* is the same book as *Sameness and Substance* is not a question of importance – the matter of a joke that will fail nobody who wants to make it, or else of an exercise for the reader (not to be attempted before reading the new Chapter Six or without regard to the sort of ambiguities set out in Chapter One, §§6–7). The present text seeks to correct all the things in the 1980 version that I know to be plain wrong. Then, in the same dialect of mid twentieth-century English, it extends that version at some of the places where more was needed. Most conspicuously, there is a new chapter about identity, vagueness and supervenience; and, as requested, the old chapter on personal identity is entirely replaced. Those who interest themselves closely in the annals of disputes about these subjects will have to retrieve the old pages 149–89 from the same dust-heap of history as harbours most of the theses and questions once explored in the Longer Notes of the 1980 version.

In the text from 1980 that survived all these decisions, there has been rewriting and abbreviation. Neither of these processes could be carried far enough. But the reader may be assured that the present version does not set out to transcribe everything that still seems to me to be true from *Sameness and Substance* (1980) or from the book that *Sameness and Substance* itself consolidated. That earlier book was called *Identity and Spatio-Temporal*

Continuity, was published in 1967 and ran to seventy-eight pages of text. By chance or good luck, the present preface is addressed from the same place as was the 1967 preface. But neither chance nor luck, nor yet an inflexible will to abandon absolutely everything save that which is central, could have restored the same brevity or the same simplicity of purpose that was possible in 1967, given the wider range of well formed questions now wanting attention.

This is not the book that I should have written if I had been starting afresh or I had been able to train a freer fancy or a more impartial attention upon the logical and philosophical literature of identity produced in the twenty-one years since *Sameness and Substance* was given to the publisher. But I have tried to update whatever has been allowed to remain – or else to test it off the page against alternative options made newly visible. It has been a great help that Sabina Lovibond's and Stephen Williams's collection *Identity, Truth and Value: Essays for David Wiggins* (Blackwell, 1996), henceforth their (1996), recently obliged me to review everything I was committed to. *Sameness and Substance Renewed* follows through the implications of the commentary I offered in *Identity, Truth and Value* upon the essays presented there by Timothy Williamson, Harold Noonan and Paul Snowdon. Not only that. It follows through the reactions to which I was moved or provoked by the numerous other items that I happened upon in composing replies to these three scholars. For everything Williamson, Noonan and Snowdon did directly and indirectly to provoke these reactions I am extremely grateful. In the case of some of the other *démarches* in the field, however, it has seemed that the best reaction is to take note but remain silent. Some will disappear without the ministrations of comment or criticism. Others will not disappear, but will seem misguided to anyone I can convince of the correctness of the approach to identity that is exemplified in this book. Yet others of more recent provenance must wait their turn to be read until this book is given to the new publisher, who has waited long enough.

Acknowledgements to Noonan and Snowdon apart, as to Williamson (who did me a further favour by accepting the publisher's invitation to review the whole draft), there are newer debts of gratitude, to William Child, Stephen Williams, Christopher Peacocke, Naci Mehmet and Ian Rumfitt, for instance, each of whom read some version of some chapter or section or extract. I am grateful to New College and the Sub-Faculty of Philosophy at Oxford for substantial technical assistance and especially to Jo Cartmell. Without her the task could not have been completed. From earlier times, a variety of philosophical acknowledgements

must be carried forward that are no less real for being old: first (from the monograph of 1967) there are special thanks to Professors P. T. Geach, W. A. Hodges and B. A. O. Williams. From 1980, there are acknowledgements to M. K. Davies, E. L. Hussey, D. W. Hamlyn, R. A. Wollheim, C. A. B. Peacocke, M. L. C. Nussbaum, D. F. Cheesman, J. A. W. Kamp, N. Tennant, J. H. McDowell. Debts were incurred on a much larger scale in 1977–8 to Sir Peter Strawson and Jennifer Hornsby. In 1980 I made more general acknowledgements to various papers by Hilary Putnam, Saul Kripke and Richard Cartwright, and to *Leibniz's Philosophy of Logic and Language* by Hidé Ishiguro. In divers and different ways, each of these authors informed or strengthened the various convictions that I needed in order to shape the characteristic, however insufficiently qualified, claims of *Sameness and Substance* concerning the mutual dependence of the ideas of substance, causality, law, and *de re* necessity.

In *Identity and Spatio-Temporal Continuity*, dark claims were entered about the relevance and importance for the theory of individuation of the philosophy of biology. In *Sameness and Substance* it would have been good if there had been more about these matters. After the abandonment of Longer Notes, all that remains here are certain sketchy remarks in Chapters Two and Three. But I shall recall from the 1980 Preface the keen pleasure that I felt at that time on discovering how, in response to all the facts that confront the biological scientist, Professor J. Z. Young had arrived, in chapters Five and Six of his *Introduction to the Study of Man* (Oxford, 1971), at a conception of identity and persistence through time that is strikingly similar, where living things are concerned, to the neo-Aristotelian conception that I defend:

The essence of a living thing is that it consists of atoms of the ordinary chemical elements we have listed, caught up into the living system and made part of it for a while. The living activity takes them up and organizes them in its characteristic way. The life of a man consists essentially in the activity he imposes upon that stuff . . . it is only by virtue of this activity that the shape and organization of the whole is maintained.

Two other good things that have happened since 1967 are the recognition in the philosophical community at large of the persisting conceptual importance, all foolish revivalism apart, of Aristotle's biology and philosophy of life; and the development by Peter Simons (in *Parts: A Study in Ontology*, Oxford, 1987) of a new account of the part–whole relationship that is far less alien to the present inquiry than the works of classical extensional mereology that I criticize so relentlessly in Chapters One, Two and Three.

In 1980 it seemed that there were two important things I had to say about identity and individuation. One came down to this. Identity was an absolute relation, yet, despite this, identity was not bare continuity. *A fortiori*, neither identity nor even the identity relation as restricted to material objects could be the same relation as continuity as such. *Identity and Spatio-Temporal Continuity* (1967) had been a first engagement in the war against this idea, which was no less dispensable, I said, than it was incoherent. Hence came the thesis of Sortal Dependency, labelled **D** in *Sameness and Substance* (1980). This said that behind every true identity claim there stands an identity covered by the concept of some particular kind of thing (in a wide range of empirical cases, a substance-kind). Once **D** was in place, the philosophical work that remained was to show how, in all their strictness, the formal properties of the relation of identity can be sustained by our kind-based individuating practices.

Among the further consequences derived from sortal dependency were a modest but specifically individuating (contrast referential) form of essentialism and the second of the special things I thought I had to say in 1980. This was the doubtfulness of the separation, supposedly obvious or truistic and still widely insisted upon, between ontological and conceptual questions. Here, even if some of the things rehearsed in the previous paragraph have come to be accepted as commonplace, I think I have made scarcely any impression on received ideas about the sharp division of questions of ontology from questions of ideology. (In Quine's sense of "ideology". See *From a Logical Point of View*, Harvard, 1953, p. 131.) As in the 1980 version, the case for this adjustment is expressed in Chapter Five and that which leads up to it. In *Sameness and Substance Renewed*, Chapter Five prepares the way for some fresh reflections, pursued further in Chapter Six, about identity, vagueness, determinacy and the singularity of the identity relation. It is here that I think the conceptualist insight I try to formulate in Chapters Five and Six shines a new light onto certain familiar questions, questions already transformed by Timothy Williamson's sharp critique of received theories of vagueness. See his recent book, *Vagueness* (London, 1995). Before the insight that I call the conceptualist insight falls into the wrong hands, however, let me say immediately that it is all of a piece with the absolute and adamant hardness of truth. (See Chapter Six, §6.) The same goes for the increasing emphasis placed upon the irreducibly practical aspect of our acts of individuation. This may even amount to a third important thing that I think I have to say.

Chapter Six makes a protest against the idea that, even if identity is

strictly irreducible, it must supervene somehow upon other properties and relations of objects, and supervene in such a way that these will constitute locally sufficient grounding for a judgment of identity. By this protest, I position the theory of identity and individuation to see the making of identity judgments in an altogether other way. Let us see it as an extension of our practical capacity to single out things of a given kind and then, in the light of an understanding of the behaviour of things of that kind, to keep track of them. The fully fledged judgment of identity outgrows its primitive origin but, according to my account, it does not lose touch with the original enterprise that it extends.

If I had seen all this clearly in 1980, if I had seen the opportunity it affords for fresh modes of philosophical exposition, I think I might have found a way to treat the questions of identity and individuation otherwise than in the technical-sounding language of principles of individuation, persistence, identity, activity. To dispense altogether with all talk of such principles would have been a noble endeavour. But it would have required a completely new book, one that strained less after generality or that only achieved it by the extended demonstration and discussion of eminent instances. Instead, the thing I shall say here about principles of individuation and so on is simply this: given that any serious or ontologically committal use of language of this kind can only multiply the kind of problems that philosophy has already with entelechies, forms, potentialities, actualities, etc., and given that such use may threaten an explanatory regress (as Penelope Mackie has properly observed, see her *op. cit.* at note 22, Chapter Four), all talk of such things needs to be understood as notional. What would it be to treat it so? Well, here is a start. To see that the principle of individuation for a buzzard is not the same as the principle for a bat, to see that the principle of individuation for a teapot is not the same as that for a housefly – there is no more to this (and no less) than there is to seeing what a difference there is between these things *from the practical point of view of singling them out, of keeping track of them and of chronicling what they do.*

Chapter Seven, the new chapter on personal identity, focuses on human beinghood, and recants anything I have ever said against Bishop Butler's objection to Locke's account of personal identity. The chief aim is to treat personal identity for what it is, namely a special case with a special power to test any emerging answer to the general question of the identity and individuation of substances. The chapter reviews briefly the course of controversy on these matters since the nineteen sixties, when a thought experiment of Sydney Shoemaker's deflected me and many

other philosophers towards the neo-Lockean conception of personal identity. My completed recantation, which perseveres in doubts Bernard Williams, Paul Snowdon and I have expressed over a long period, comprises considerations *inter alia* of epistemology and the cognitive activity of human beings. On this basis, I seek to show that there is no non-vacuous sense in which one can say “the ordinary further facts of human personality *supervene* upon the facts of mental and physical continuity and connectedness”. (*Pace* the philosophers who say that sort of thing, those mental and physical facts are *already* identity-involving.) I must add, however, that despite the completion of this recantation of all neo-Lockean tendencies, I cling to my admiration of Locke’s *Essay* II:27, not least (now) of his “forensic” conception. This last has usually been taken to support the Lockean over the human being conception of personal identity. In the light of the considerations of physiognomy that I try now to insist upon, I think that the chief contribution of the forensic conception is to make us (the persons that we are) see the difficulty of conceiving of a person (conceiving of one of us) otherwise than as a being with a human form. Rereading the old chapter in *Sameness and Substance* that the new Chapter Seven replaces, I find that this anticipated and spelled out at great length a range of practical and moral apprehensions arising from the prospect of other, quasi-functional or quasi-artefactual, conceptions of personhood gaining ground. The fact that the ensuing twenty years have intensified these apprehensions might be ground for intellectual satisfaction. (For no other.) But the intervening years equally suggest the need to condense the apprehensions themselves into one or two bare paragraphs. At this point of the argument, the thing that matters is the intimate connexion between such apprehensions, familiar as they will now be to almost every reader, and the range of rival conceptions, some of them artefactual, some of them (like mine) anti-artefactual, of what *kind* of thing it is we are concerned to individuate when we ask what a human person is.

Readers who wish to begin by seizing the main essentials of the theory of identity and individuation which leads into all these other things (or so I claim) should not labour too hard over the later sections of the Preamble, which is mainly methodological and terminological. Terminological explanations that are essential – and some of them are indeed essential – are given again or referred back to as and when they are needed in the body of the book. The chief purpose of the Preamble is to place all these explanations where they belong, namely in a single framework within which they will show themselves to be

singly and collectively defensible. Those convinced of the wrongness of my substantive conclusions or who object to the method of reaching them ought, in due course, to take the precaution of reading the Preamble through to the end.

Readers who are prepared to skip should read Chapter One, sections 1–5, and then advance immediately to Chapter One, sections 9 and 10, before reading Chapters Two and Three. A summary is given at Chapter Three, section 5, of this material, just as a partial summary is given in §2 and §8 of Chapter Five, to recapitulate Chapters Four and Five.

The chief aim of Chapters One, Two and Three of the book is to place questions of individuation, identity and persistence through time on a firmer and broader basis of theory, but in such a way that the particular point that is at issue in particular problems of identity will be locally determined. Once matters are put onto this basis, there can be securer standards (or so I claim) by which to judge *in situ*, on the basis of the right kinds of consideration, the relevance or irrelevance to the given case of empirical information that is collateral with the case. The resulting conception of individuation is principled, logically founded, yet irreducibly practical. It is *universal*, in so far as it always appeals to ideas that transcend the particular case, but also *dialectical*. It is dialectical not only in respect of how it envisages any particular decision's being reached but in respect of the individuating practices that it justifies. Room is left for these practices and the thing-kind conceptions that incorporate them to proceed in a given case by considerations that are highly specific to it (scarcely general at all). That will not prevent these considerations from being universal in import. For the distinctness of the general/specific and the universal/singular (or universal/particular) distinctions and the compatibility of specificity with universality, I would refer to R. M. Hare, *Freedom and Reason* (Oxford, 1963). (See his p. 39.) Even at this late stage in the specialization of philosophy, light can still be cast on logic and metaphysics from ethics and the philosophy of law.

The explanation of how the conception thus formed of identity and individuation coheres with the invincible strictness of the laws of identity is completed in Chapter Six, which resumes and extends some of the arguments of Chapters Four and Five. Finally, the last part of Chapter Seven (§13 onwards) offers certain general reflections about identity and individuation and follows them through. In these concluding reflections I see some culmination of the efforts of all earlier chapters. I hope that this part can be read on its own without the preceding sections of Chapter Seven.

The price of making the book skippable in this way is paid by the reader who reads it right through. I have tried however to keep to the barest minimum the amount of repetition that is entailed by the policy.

The purpose of the Select bibliography is to include a selection (updated 1999) of certain major and minor classics of the theory of identity and individuation and to make reference to other works that the reader may find useful or on which this book most heavily depends. Only incidentally is it a bibliography of personal identity or of anything else besides the theory of identity and individuation. Numerous other useful or fascinating items not included in this selection are referred to in the footnotes. I know that many books and articles left out of the Select bibliography are just as good as those I have included. Philosophers hate to contemplate such contingency, I know, but the sole aim has been to make this bibliography short enough for it to be useful, useful in its own right or usefully cognizant of the particular intellectual debts it happened the author incurred in writing or rewriting this book. The author/date system is used for references to titles included in the Select bibliography.

The chapter footnotes are part of the final defences of the theory, but they are meant to be theoretically dispensable to the basic understanding of the argument. (One regrettable departure from this policy remains, at footnote 2 of Chapter Three.) But there is no attempt to push into the text everything which points at something important. Most especially I have not attempted this where the matter in the note leads not back to the argument of the text but outwards from it. An example of that is the brief discussion in footnote 14 (formerly 12) of Chapter One of some of the differences between a substance and an event. Another example is the equally old footnote 16 of Chapter Three (now numbered 17), concerning that which I regard as the chief falsehood in the classical or original form of mereology or the calculus of individuals.

The Index is intended to secure the sense of key technical terms, printing in bold the page reference that best indicates what acceptations I have aimed, for the length of a book, to assign stably and definitely to certain technical terms used here.

December 1999
New College
Oxford

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