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THE EVOLUTION OF IDENTITY: FROM ANCIENT THOUGHT TO THE EARLY MODERN PERIOD

To fully understand the notion of identity it is essential to trace its origins back to ancient times. The evolution of identity has been influenced by a wide range of intellectual, cultural, and social forces, and examining its historical development makes it possible to appreciate the complexity and depth of this concept.

The origins of the concept of identity can be traced back to ancient Greek philosophy, where Parmenides, Heraclitus, Plato, and Aristotle attempted to answer questions about the nature of identity. In the medieval periods Christian theologians such as Augustine of Hippo, Anselm of Canterbury, Thomas Aquinas and others were thinking about identity through the lens of the soul, salvation, and divine purpose. The identity of a person was seen as something that was rooted in the relationship between the individual and God.

The Renaissance marked a shift in how identity was viewed. The rise of humanism, a cultural and intellectual movement, emphasized the value and dignity of the individual. Thinkers like Petrarch, Machiavelli, Erasmus and others began to focus more on human nature and personal development, encouraging individuals to explore their personal identity through introspection and self-examination.

The Enlightenment brought about a more rational and empirical approach to identity. For instance, John Locke argued that personal identity was tied to the continuity of consciousness and memory rather than to the soul or body. His theory helped lay the groundwork for modern psychological approaches to identity, focusing on the individual's inner life and self-awareness.

By understanding the roots of identity it is possible to gain a more comprehensive view of the self and how it has been constructed, both individually and collectively, throughout history.

Key words: identity, soul, change, the self.

Для повного розуміння поняття ідентичності, якою вона є сьогодні, важливо простежити її витоки з найдавніших часів. Еволюція ідентичності відбувалася під впливом широкого кола інтелектуальних, культурних і соціальних сил, а вивчення її історичного розвитку дає можливість оцінити складність і глибину цього поняття.

Витоки концепції ідентичності можна простежити в давньогрецькій філософії, де Парменід, Геракліт, Платон та Аристотель намагалися відповісти на питання про природу ідентичності. У середньовіччі християнські богослови, такі як Августин Блаженний, Фома Аквінський та інші, розглядали ідентичність через призму душі, спасіння та божественного призначення. Ідентичність людини розглядалася як щось, що вкорінене у відносинах між людиною і Богом.

Епоха Відродження ознаменувала зміну у поглядах на ідентичність. Зростання гуманізму, культурного та інтелектуального руху наголошувало на цінності та гідності особистості. Такі

мислителі, як Петрарка, Макіавеллі, Еразм та інші, почали більше уваги приділяти людській природі та особистісному розвитку, заохочуючи людей досліджувати свою особисту ідентичність через інтроспекцію та самоаналіз.

Просвітництво принесло більш раціональний та емпіричний підхід до ідентичності. Наприклад, Дж. Локк стверджував, що особиста ідентичність пов'язана з безперервністю свідомості та пам'яті, а не з душею чи тілом. Його теорія допомогла закласти основу для сучасних психологічних підходів до ідентичності, зосереджуючись на внутрішньому житті та самосвідомості людини.

Розуміючи коріння ідентичності – чи то в античній філософії, релігійній думці, гуманізмі епохи Відродження, чи то в розумінні Просвітництва – можна отримати більш повне уявлення про самість і про те, як вона змінювалася як на індивідуальному, так і на колективному рівнях протягом історії.

Ключові слова: ідентичність, душа, зміна, самість.

Formulation of the problem. Today, identity is understood as a complex and multi-dimensional notion that includes psychological, social, and cultural factors. However, to understand the depth of this complexity, we must look back to its historical roots. The historical study of identity is incredibly valuable because it allows us to trace the evolution of how individuals and societies have understood the notion of identity over time. By examining historical perspectives on identity, scientists can gain insight into the social, cultural, religious, and philosophical contexts that have shaped the way people perceive themselves and others. For example, exploring how identity was understood in different eras can reveal how shifting ideas about the self, consciousness, and society have influenced personal and collective identities.

Unfortunately, in spite of the fact that the historical study of identity provides important context and helps to make the evolution of the notion of identity more understandable, it still remains an underexplored area of research. While scholars have made a significant progress in analyzing how identity has shifted over time, much of this work has yet to be fully integrated into mainstream academic discourse. The complexities of how identity has been constructed, interpreted, and transformed across different cultures, historical periods, and social contexts are vast and multifaceted, yet these nuances often go unexamined. Additionally, the lack of a comprehensive and cohesive framework for understanding the historical development of identity contributes to its relative neglect within academic circles. Thus, the **aim of our study** is to analyse the development of ideas about the notion of identity from ancient times to the Early Modern Period.

Presentation of the main material. The history of the development of the notion of identity is associated with the development of general philosophical and psychological approaches to the problem of human individuality, the search for the meaning of existence, awareness of place and role in society, similarity and difference from other people. The first attempts to conceptualise identity are connected with the fundamental questions of being, change and cognition. Already in ancient Greek philosophy it was considered as a part of ontological and logical research, touching upon the issues of identity and difference, stability and changeability.

One of the first philosophers to raise the question of identity was Parmenides (6 – 5 centuries BC). In his philosophical poem "On Nature", he argued that Being is one and cannot be divided as it doesn't have any start or end, and it doesn't change with time. Any changes that happen are not from Being to Non-being; they are just changes within Being [8; 9]. This meant that true reality is unchanging, unified and identical to itself. Any change and multiplicity is perceived only as illusion. Thus, in Parmenidean philosophy, identity is correlated with absolute immutability.

The point of view of Heraclitus was quite different. According to Plato, Heraclitus stated that everything is in continuous motion like a flowing river and, of course, the water is not the same two moments together: "…all the things are in process and nothing stays still, and likening existing things to the stream of the river <…> that you would not step twice into the same river." [9, 196-197] So, while for

Parmenides identity was expressed through permanence, for Heraclitus it cannot be defined outside the process of change. This calls into question the very possibility of a sustainable identity: if everything is in constant motion, can anything remain itself?

Aristotle in "The Metaphysics" formulated a fundamental logical law – the law of identity (A is A). According to this principle, every essence is identical to itself, and hence identity is thinkable as a stable property of the object. However, Aristotle also introduced "essence vs accidence" opposition, which makes it possible to take into account both the stability of things and their changeability [1; 5].

The question of personal identity first arises within the philosophy of the soul. Plato, in one of his famous dialogues "Phaedo", argued that the true essence of man is his soul, which retains identity even after the death of the body. Aristotle, on the other hand, in his "De Anima", viewed the soul as a form of the body, which ties personal identity to bodily existence [5; 8; 9; 13]. These ideas laid the groundwork for future discussions on the nature of personality and its continuity.

Medieval philosophy, especially through the works of scholars like Augustine of Hippo, Anselm of Canterbury, and Thomas Aquinas, played a crucial role in developing the problem of identity. This issue, while rooted in ancient philosophy, became more noticeable in the medieval period due to the influence of Christian theology and the attempt to reconcile ancient Greek thought (particularly from Plato and Aristotle) with Christian doctrine.

Medieval philosophers often focused on questions about the identity of God in relation to the world. Central to this was the question of how a transcendent, eternal God could be identified with a finite and changing world. For instance, Augustine of Hippo (also Saint Augustine) struggled with understanding how the unchanging nature of God could be related to the changeable nature of creation. In this context, the identity of God was seen as unchanging and simple, while created beings were seen as accidental and subject to change. Augustine also explored how individual souls, which are distinct from one another, maintain their identity before God despite being subject to sin and change [3; 15]. Thomas Aquinas and others argued that, even in a changing world, things retain their identity because they are grounded in something unchanging – whether in God, the soul, or natural law [2; 12].

Besides, Christian theologians also were thinking about the issue of identity when discussing the nature of the Trinity – the identity of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The challenge was to preserve the unity of God's essence while maintaining the distinct identities of each person in the Trinity. This question of how distinct identities could coexist within a single divine substance was a profound philosophical problem that medieval thinkers like Anselm and Aquinas worked to resolve, drawing on both philosophical reasoning and theological insights [7; 8; 12].

Also it should be mentioned the question of personal identity which was central to Augustine's thought as well, particularly in his reflections on the soul and memory. In works like "The Confessions", Augustine wondered how a person remains the same through time despite changes in experiences, physical states, and even thoughts. He famously reflected on how the soul's memory allowed for a continuous sense of self-identity over time [3; 15]. This idea would later influence the modern philosophical problem of personal identity.

As it has been mentioned above, the notion of identity also connected with Aristotelian metaphysics, which was highly influential during the medieval period, especially in the works of Thomas Aquinas. Aquinas used Aristotle's distinction between *substance* (what a thing is) and *accidents* (what a thing has, such as colour or size). The problem of identity arises here because a thing's identity must be based on its substance, even though its accidents may change. For example, a person might grow older or change appearance, but their underlying identity remains intact because their substance (the soul and essential being) persists. This led to the medieval effort to understand how change can occur without altering the core identity of a thing. [8; 12]

Medieval philosophers like Boethius also reflected on the identity of knowledge, particularly how knowledge about a thing relates to the thing itself [7; 15]. This touches on questions about how we can know something without changing it, and how our perception of an object relates to its true identity. This

issue was particularly relevant for medieval thinkers trying to reconcile faith and reason – how can we know things through reason without distorting their true identity, particularly in the case of divine truths?

Also, it can be seen that Auctores Ecclesiastici (i.e. ancient Christian writers who are thought to be less important for didactic theology or whose opinions are presumed to be questionable, such as Arnobius, Clement of Alexandria, Tertullian, etc. [7]) in their writings began using the word "identitās" (the root of the word is "idem" – "the same") with the meaning "sameness" or "identity" [17, 295].

Thus, medieval philosophy contributed significantly to the development of the problem of identity by deepening the inquiry into what it means for something (or someone) to be the same over time despite change. The blending of ancient philosophical traditions with Christian theology created a rich context for exploring the nature of identity, particularly in relation to God, the soul, individuals, and the natural world. These medieval reflections on identity laid the groundwork for many later philosophical debates, particularly in the early modern period, concerning personal identity, metaphysics, and the nature of reality itself.

During the Early Modern Period the problem of identity took on a new character, particularly with the development of psychological concepts related to the self and the human mind. This period marked a transition from medieval theological views of the self to a more psychological, introspective understanding of human nature, one that increasingly focused on personal experience, individual consciousness, and the complexities of the inner life. The development of early psychological ideas laid the foundation for modern psychology and altered how identity was perceived.

The Renaissance (from 14th to 17th century) marked a revival of classical ideas from ancient Greece and Rome, particularly the emphasis on humanism – an intellectual movement that focused on the value of the individual and the human experience. The humanist movement led thinkers to focus on the individual subject, marking an early psychological shift. The exploration of selfhood was no longer simply about external social roles or religious identity but was now seen through the lens of personal thought, emotions, and experiences. Humanist scholars, such as Petrarch, Erasmus, and Machiavelli, emphasized the centrality of the human being in the universe. This shift led to a more personal, subjective approach to identity. Rather than viewing identity primarily through the lens of religious or divine providence (as in the medieval period), Renaissance thinkers like Petrarch and Erasmus began to explore human nature, not just in terms of religious or divine purpose, but as an autonomous, rational, and emotional being [6; 8]. In doing so, they prompted a new focus on the inner life and the personal psychology of the individual.

Humanism placed significant emphasis on the human capacity for reason, creativity, and introspection, and these qualities became central to the new understanding of personal identity. For instance, Michel de Montaigne in his "The Complete Essays" famously explored the fluidity and complexity of the individual self. Moreover, he was one of the first to explicitly question the nature of identity and selfhood, reflecting on how the human person is both constant and ever-changing. His famous phrase "What do I know?" captures this skepticism and inquiry into personal identity. Besides, it was Montaigne who made the idea of self-reflection and introspection important due to his writings about the complexity of the human psyche, addressing the self as a subject of personal inquiry and psychological exploration. Montaigne famously explored the contradictions and variability of the human experience, noting how identity is not a static, fixed entity but rather something fluid and changing. He described how humans can hold multiple conflicting ideas and feelings, illustrating the dynamic nature of personal identity. His writing reflects an awareness of the mind's complexity, signalling an early psychological shift away from simply viewing identity as a fixed essence or divine gift toward an understanding of identity as a product of personal experience, emotions, and mental processes [11].

Enlightenment introduced a new psychological and philosophical development through the work of René Descartes, who is often considered the father of modern philosophy and a key figure in the history of psychology. Descartes' famous declaration, "Cogito, ergo sum" ("I think, therefore I am"), emphasized the role of consciousness and self-awareness in the formation of identity. For Descartes, the thinking subject – the individual mind capable of doubt, thought, and reflection – became the foundation for personal

identity. His focus on the self-conscious mind as the core of the human experience shifted psychological thought away from theological or purely physical explanations of the self toward one based on mental processes. Descartes argued that the self could be known and understood through reason and thought, setting the stage for later psychological theories that would explore consciousness, perception, and personal identity as products of the mind [4].

Descartes' work also laid the groundwork for the idea of dualism – the separation of mind and body – which continued to influence psychological theories of the self, identity, and consciousness. The Cartesian focus on subjectivity and mental experience highlighted the importance of individual perception in shaping one's identity, a key theme in the evolution of psychological thought [4].

In turn, building on the Cartesian notion of self-consciousness, John Locke further developed ideas about personal identity, particularly through his theory of memory and consciousness. In his work "An Essay Concerning Human Understanding", Locke proposed that personal identity is not rooted in the substance of the body or the soul but in the continuity of consciousness. According to Locke, an individual remains the same person over time as long as he retains memory of his past actions and experiences. What is more, Locke made a distinction between the idea of 'man' and the idea of 'person'. A person is "a thinking intelligent Being, that has reason and reflection, and can consider it self as itself, the same thinking thing in different times and places" [10, 335]. Locke argued that self-consciousness is what defines a person, and a person's identity is tied to the continuity of his self-consciousness. "As far as this consciousness can be extended backwards to any past Action or Thought, so far reaches the Identity of that Person; it is the same self now as it was then; and 'tis by the same self with this present one that now reflects on it, that that Action was done" [10, 335].

Thus, Locke's theory introduced a psychological dimension to the problem of identity, suggesting that psychological continuity – the ability to remember and reflect upon one's past – is what makes an individual the same person throughout different stages of life. This notion directly tied personal identity to psychological processes, particularly memory and self-awareness, marking a significant departure from earlier religious or metaphysical explanations of identity. Locke's ideas influenced later psychological thought, particularly in the development of theories of selfhood and personality. By emphasizing memory and self-awareness as central to identity, Locke introduced the notion that the mind – and not just the body – was the locus of personal identity. This psychological understanding of identity influenced later thinkers, particularly in the development of psychological theories of identity in the 19th and 20th centuries.

Jean-Jacques Rousseau, in contrast to individualistic theories like those of Locke, proposed that identity is not merely an internal, self-generated construct but is significantly shaped by the influences of society and the complex dynamics of social relationships. Rousseau contended that the development of a person's sense of self is intricately tied to the broader community, where interactions, collective values, and social expectations play pivotal roles. He stressed that an individual's identity is in constant negotiation with these social forces, creating a tension between the individual's desire for autonomy and the societal pressures that seek to define and regulate behaviour. Rousseau's examination of this struggle between personal freedom and societal conformity provided important insights into the ways in which identity is not a purely solitary, internal experience, but something that is constantly being shaped and reshaped within the context of social interactions and cultural norms [14]. His ideas served as a foundation for later philosophical and sociological explorations, where thinkers would explore deeper how group membership, cultural values, and social expectations influence and contribute to the ongoing formation and evolution of identity. Rousseau's work underscored the idea that personal identity is a dynamic process, intertwined with the collective forces that guide and shape individual lives within society.

As Early Modern Period progressed, identity began to be understood not only in terms of rational thought and consciousness but also in terms of emotions and psychological complexity. Thinkers like Baruch (also Benedict) Spinoza and Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz began exploring the role of emotions, desires, and mental states in shaping identity. Spinoza, for example, proposed that human emotions and desires are integral to understanding the self, suggesting that our sense of identity is intertwined with our

emotional and psychological states. In his "Ethics", Spinoza argued that human beings are not purely rational creatures, but rather, our identities are shaped by complex interactions between our thoughts, emotions, and desires [16]. This psychological insight laid the foundation for later psychological theories that would explore the role of affect, emotion, and unconscious drives in the formation of identity.

The growing interest in psychology during the Early Modern Period coincided with a broader cultural shift towards subjectivity – the idea that personal experience, emotions, and thoughts are central to understanding the self. This shift placed the inner life of the individual at the forefront of intellectual inquiry, moving beyond external factors like social status or religious duties. Personal identity was now seen as something deeply tied to the psychological experience of being human – how one thinks, feels, perceives, and remembers.

Philosophers and early psychologists began to emphasize the self as a subjective, psychological entity. This development foreshadowed the later rise of modern psychology, where the study of identity would expand to include unconscious processes, emotional life, and personal experience as key components of the self.

During the Early Modern Period the problem of identity became more deeply linked with psychological concepts. Thinkers began to recognize that personal identity is not just a theological or metaphysical issue but one rooted in human experience, consciousness, and emotional life. Through the works of Montaigne, Descartes, Locke, and others, identity was reframed as something intrinsically connected to self-awareness, memory, emotion, and consciousness – foundations that would eventually lead to the field of psychology. The intellectual movements of this time set the stage for modern understandings of the self as a complex, evolving psychological entity.

Conclusions. To examine the idea of identity today, it is crucial to trace its origins back to ancient times because the concept of identity has evolved through centuries of philosophical, psychological, and cultural developments. Understanding the roots of identity – whether in ancient philosophy, religious thought, Renaissance humanism, or Enlightenment reason – provides a deeper context for how modern notions of selfhood, personal identity, and social identity emerged and transformed over time.

The concept of identity appeared in the ancient world, where early philosophical inquiries laid the groundwork for future debates about the nature of the self and the soul. In the medieval periods Christian theologians were thinking about identity through the lens of the soul, salvation, and divine purpose. The identity of a person was seen as something that was rooted in the relationship between the individual and God. During the Renaissance, the revival of classical ideas and the humanist movement further contributed to the shaping of identity by emphasizing the value of the individual and human potential. The Enlightenment period brought about a profound transformation in the understanding of identity. The rise of reason and scientific inquiry led to a more empirical and rational approach to identity.

Thus, the idea of identity is not a new phenomenon; rather, it has been shaped by millennia of thought across different civilizations and intellectual traditions. By exploring these diverse historical origins, it is possible to gain valuable insights into how identity has evolved in response to changing cultural, philosophical, and societal landscapes. By examining the foundations laid by earlier thinkers and traditions, we can better understand the fundamental principles that continue to influence modern understandings of who we are, both as individuals and as members of broader communities. Through this historical lens, we can appreciate the enduring complexity of identity and the ongoing evolution of its meaning in the context of our ever-changing world.

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