The Importance of Being Earnest
Why ethics and culture matter in identity management

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- He was originally trained as a medical doctor (M.D. from “La Sapienza”, 1981; specialisation in gastroenterology, 1984) before switching to psychoanalysis (registered psychoanalyst, 1989;) and then to ethics and social sciences (M.Phil. from the Pontifical University of Rome “Angelicum”, 1994).

- Emilio Mordini’s current research concerns biometrics and identification technologies, and their social, ethical, cultural and legal implications. This research focuses on the political, social and ethical implications of recent developments in identification technology and the ways in which these change our ideas about human identity, about the distinction between private and public spheres.
Privacy
Europe
Immigr.
Future
DNA
Pub.Cons.

FINAL CONFERENCE

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IDENTITY AND SECURITY

The chief principle of a well-regulated police state is this: That each citizen shall be at all times and places ... recognized as this or that particular person. **No one must remain unknown to the police.** This can be attained with certainty only in the following manner: Each one must always carry a pass with him, signed by his immediate government official, in which his person is accurately described. There must be no exception to this rule.

*Johann G. Fichte, THE SCIENCE OF RIGHTS.*
I would like to challenge this statement and this belief.

I aim to demonstrate that Identification is:

1) Culturally constructed (i.e., there is no objective ID to be unveiled)
2) A means to empower people rather than a means by which the Power rules people
3) A fundamental Human Right
What is “identity”? 

“To say of anything that it is identical with itself is trivial, and to say that it is identical with anything else is absurd.”

(W.O. Quine, Quiddities)

When we state something about the identity of “A”, we assert that, under that specific circumstance, “A” is identical to any other “A” sharing the same properties (e.g., when we state that the identity of an apple is being an apple, we actually state that an apple is identical with any other apple under this specific circumstance). But when we state that “A” is “A”, we mean that there are not two different items but only one (e.g., when we state that this apple is the apple we purchased yesterday, we are actually saying that there is only one apple with two different descriptions).
Yet Quine is still overoptimistic…

Not only anything cannot be identical to anything else but anything cannot be identical even with itself because time never stops and – all other conditions being equal – time coordinates will be different,

Nothing is truly identical to anything else whenever it was, is, and will be.

Every physical item is continuously changing. Beings are made up by time, every existing object flows over time and goes by…

No man ever steps in the same river twice, for it's not the same river and he's not the same man

Heraclitus
None of these questions is obviously new, yet what makes them new is their current political relevance.

Defining the conditions for individual identification does not reduce to specifying conditions for identities of persons, for personal continuity or survival, or for other highly metaphysical questions.

Defining the conditions for individual identification means specifying the characteristics that distinguish a person, the elements by which a person is distinguished by other persons.

Any kind of transactions and the whole political, legal and financial domains could not be even thinkable if there was no certainty about personal identity.
1° Argument

- Identity is an empty term, if it is taken rigorously.
- When one speaks of personal identity and personal identification one is referring to an important social practice, which changes over time and across different cultures.
Personal Identity and its Components

Personal Identity means diverse things and there are diverse degrees of identifiability.
Legal Name

- Identification may involve a person's legal name. The assumption is made that there is only one John Smith born to particular parents at a given time and place. Even twins have different first names and birth times.
- Name usually involves connection to a biological or social lineage and can be a key to a vast amount of other information.
Locability

- Identification can refer to a person's address: it answers a "where" rather than a "who" question.
- Downing Street" or "Number 10" is often used as synonim for the UK Prime Ministers.
- This involves "reachability", whether in actual or cyberspace (telephone number, mail or E-mail address, an account number).
- It does involve the ability to take various forms of action such as blocking, granting access, delivering or picking up, charging, penalizing, rewarding or apprehending.
Pseudonyms 1

- Identification may involve alphabetic, numerical or other symbols such as a social security number or biometric patterns which can be linked back to a person.

- As with name, the symbol is intended to refer to only one individual (but unlike a given name which can be shared, letters and numbers are sufficient as unique identifiers).
Identification may involve symbols which **can not in the normal course of events be linked back to a person.**

PINs (Personal Identification Numbers) are an example of personal symbols which can save anonymity.
Identification may involve certification in which the possession of knowledge (secret passwords, codes) or artifacts (tickets, badges, tattoos, uniforms) or skills labels one as a particular kind of person to be treated in a given away.

This is categorical and identifies their possessor as an eligible or ineligible person with no necessary reference to anything more. This may be linked back to a unique person/place identity, but need not be.
Distinctive patterns

Identification may be made by reference to distinctive appearance or behavior patterns of persons.

Being unnamed is not necessarily the same as being unknown. Some information is always evident in face-to-face interaction because we are all ambulatory autobiographies continuously and unavoidably emitting data for other's senses and machines.

Similarly detectives may attribute re-occurring crimes to a given individual even though they don't know the person's name (e.g., the Unabomber, Jack-the-Ripper).
Identity as a set of infinite sets

Living

Human

Portuguese Citizen

President of the EC

Male

Located in Brussels
Identity results from the intersection between different sets to which one belongs, any society and culture define those sets that it believes to be relevant.

Personal identification systems are all based on the fiction that there is an ultimate set made up only by one individual, that is the indentified individual.
Till the beginning of the modern era, most people did not need to demonstrate their identities, but a few categories of mobile people such as pilgrims, beggars, messengers.
This order was overturned with the birth of the modern nation state.

The origins of the modern nation-state system can be located in the group of centralised European territorial states that emerged during the sixteenth century.

Those states developed centralised administrations, established precise borders, delimited their populations, and founded a system of interstate relations which provided for reciprocal recognition of integrity and sovereignty.
STATE AND IDENTITY 3

- After the Westphalia treaty all people were ascribed nationality.

- Citizenship emerged within this system as a means of facilitating governance and establishing control over the movement of populations.
IDENTITY IS BASED ON BIRTH REGISTRATION

BIRTH CERTIFICATE

IDENTITY CARD

US ID
BIRTH REGISTRATION IS A LEGAL ACT ENFORCED BY A NATION STATE, WHICH GIVES “CIVIL” BIRTH TO A NEW CITIZEN
Why identification/verification matter today?

The couple citizenship/personal identity emerged from around the sixteenth century, and is beginning to disintegrate.

Globalization, which is in its essence removal of fix boundaries, implies weakening of the traditional concept of citizenship and personal identity based upon the notion of a bounded society.

An important outcome of globalization is thus the development of automated systems for human identification.

These technologies originate from some practical problems but they unavoidably tend to take over one vital function on nation states, that is certification of identities.
The world is in increasing and constant transit. On any given day, about 8 million people are flying in the sky. The figure was 100,000 in 1983, and 3 million in 1999.
Types of mobile populations

Note: ‘UNHCR population of concern includes refugees, asylum seekers, returnees (returned refugees), Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs), returned IDPs, and others of concern to UNHCR (stateless, those holding temporary asylum, etc).

Sources:
Unreliable IDs

1. Bad Quality
2. Fake Documents
3. Translitteration of different alphabets
4. Lack of birth certificate
Unreliable identities

In 2000 the UNICEF has calculated that 50 million babies (41% of births worldwide) were not registered and thus without any identity document. Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal have not yet made mandatory child registration at birth.
World Percentage of Unregistered Children

- Industrialized countries: 2%
- Latin America & the Caribbean: 15%
- Middle East & North Africa: 16%
- East Asia & the Pacific: 19%
- CEE/CIS and Baltic States: 23%
- Sub-Saharan Africa: 55%
- South Asia: 63%
An increasing number of online applications require a reliable means of identification of users.

There are numerous examples such applications including Internet banking, online trading, remote management of confidential databases and access to personal information B2B.

The conventional means of identification (e.g. passwords, personal identification numbers) can be easily compromised, observed or forgotten.
## WORLD INTERNET USAGE AND POPULATION STATISTICS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>World Regions</th>
<th>Population (2006 Est.)</th>
<th>Population % of World</th>
<th>Internet Usage, Latest Data</th>
<th>% Population (Penetration)</th>
<th>Usage % of World</th>
<th>Usage Growth 2000-2005</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Africa</td>
<td>915,210,928</td>
<td>14.1 %</td>
<td>23,649,000</td>
<td>2.6 %</td>
<td>2.3 %</td>
<td>423.9 %</td>
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<td>Asia</td>
<td>3,667,774,066</td>
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<td>380,400,713</td>
<td>10.4 %</td>
<td>36.5 %</td>
<td>232.8 %</td>
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<td>Europe</td>
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<td>294,101,844</td>
<td>36.4 %</td>
<td>28.2 %</td>
<td>179.8 %</td>
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<td>Middle East</td>
<td>190,084,161</td>
<td>2.9 %</td>
<td>18,203,500</td>
<td>9.6 %</td>
<td>1.7 %</td>
<td>454.2 %</td>
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<tr>
<td>North America</td>
<td>331,473,276</td>
<td>5.1 %</td>
<td>227,470,713</td>
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<tr>
<td>Latin America/Caribbean</td>
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<td>8.5 %</td>
<td>79,962,809</td>
<td>14.7 %</td>
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<td>350.5 %</td>
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<tr>
<td>Oceania / Australia</td>
<td>33,956,977</td>
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<td>17,872,707</td>
<td>52.6 %</td>
<td>1.7 %</td>
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<td>WORLD TOTAL</td>
<td>6,499,697,060</td>
<td>100.0 %</td>
<td>1,043,104,886</td>
<td>16.0 %</td>
<td>100.0 %</td>
<td>189.0 %</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The Identity Revolution

1) Global Human Mobility
   Mass of People in transit too huge to be handled in traditional ways

2) Unreliable Identity Documents
   Too many people without reliable documents.
   Too many unreliable States

3) Global Electronic Mobility
   Digital Identities, dispersed and globalised
IDENTITY AND STATE OF EXCEPTION

The coming politics will not be a struggle between states, but, instead, a struggle between the state and humanity.

G. Agamben, 1993
Philosophers as Agaben are nothing but the side of a coin, whose other side is Fichte.

They all presume that identification is to oppress people, to dominate and control them.

Yet it is historically false and logically untenable.
3° Argument

In Primo Levi’s memoir, *The Drowned and the Saved*, he describes the tattoo as a “pure offense”, as a hallmark by which “slaves are branded and cattle sent to slaughter”.

Concentration camps did not need to identify people, they just needed to humiliate them and cancel their identities. The tattoo WAS NOT FOR IDENTIFYING PEOPLE.

Absolute powers have ruled the world for millenia without any need to identify people, ON THE CONTRARY ABSOLUTE POWERS HAVE ALWAYS NEEDED ANONIMOUS CROWDS. HISTORICALLY SPEAKING IDENTITY HAS ALWAYS BEEN THE WAY IN WHICH THE OPPRESSED ONES AFFIRMED THEIR RIGHTS AGAINST THE RULERS
The Global Identity System

- We usually think that the request for proof of identity is an expression of power by the person doing the requesting. The requesting person may be a clerk at a food store or a security person at the airport or a police officer stopping a suspect or a guard at a highly secure military installation.

- Yet IDENTIFICATION IS THE MOST EFFECTIVE WAY TO CONTRAST CATEGORIZATION, that is actually the way in which dictatorships rule masses.

- In the ancient Greece slaves were called “faceless”, aprosopon.
- The word that in Greek designates the face, prosopon, it is also at the origin of the Latin word persona, person.

- The person is thus an individual with a face, that is out of metaphor a person with an identity.

- The right to have rights is grounded on the existence of personal identities. Only identifiable people can make claims.
Empowerment

Secure identities are not means to control citizens, on the contrary they are essential instruments to empower people.

Human rights are unthinkable without “identifiable people”.

One can be entitled with rights only if he has an identity. No political, civil and social right can be enforced on anonymous crowds. Even the right to anonymity can be enforced only if one has an identity to hide.

The right to have an identity (to be able to prove his own identity and to be identified) is therefore a dignity right, which concerns the very existence of the human person.

It should be considered within the first 6 chapters of the Chart of Rights of European Citizens.
THE REAL ISSUE

- Who is going to take care of this huge mass of people who needs reliable and trustworthy identities and credentials?
  - Nation states?
  - One or more global super-powers?
  - Private companies?

LONG TERM, THIS IS THE REAL POLITICAL AND ETHICAL QUESTION BEHIND THE IDENTITY REVOLUTION
The importance of being Ernest

- Algernon: ...your name isn't Jack at all; it is Ernest.
- Jack: It isn't Ernest; it's Jack.
- Alg: You have always told me it was Ernest. I have introduced you to everyone as Ernest. You answer to the name of Ernest. You look as if your name was Ernest. You are the most earnest looking person I ever saw in my life. It is perfectly absurd your saying that your name isn't Ernest. It's on your cards. Here is one of them. Mr Ernest Worthing, B.4, The Albany. I'll keep this as proof that your name is Ernest if ever you attempt to deny it to me, or to Gwendolen, or to anyone else.
- Jack: **Well, my name is Ernest in town and Jack in the country...**

Thank you for your attention!