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Abstract

Leibniz's principle of identity of indiscernibles stipulates that no two distinct substances exactly resemble each other; a principle that can be construed as prescribing a logical relationship between objects and properties: any two distinct objects must differ in at least one property. In this talk I will describe how Leibniz's principle, surprisingly, connects to the metamathematics of set theory. As we shall see, a natural model-theoretic formulation of Leibniz's principle holds for finite set theory (Zermelo-Fraenkel set theory, ZF, with the axiom of infinity replaced by its negation), but in the case of general set theory (ZF), the principle is equivalent to a weak version of the global form of the axiom of choice that is consistent with ZF, but unprovable in ZF.

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