

PHIL 4603: Metaphysics
Prof. Funkhouser
Perry, “The Same F ”

- Perry will argue against Geach’s claim that it makes sense to speak of identity only relative to some general term (sortal).

I.

- Geach presents his view by contrasting it with that of Frege. But Perry first considers the extent to which Frege could agree with Geach. First, Frege could concede that sometimes identity questions can be resolved only by adding a general term as a qualification (e.g., bathing in the same river/water). Second, Frege could concede that without such a qualification no “criterion of identity” is present in the example. Third, Frege could concede that statements of the form ‘ x and y are the same F ’ and ‘ x and y are the same G ’ could differ in truth value.

So, where do Geach and Frege disagree? Frege holds that, even when these sortal qualifications are added, the identity relation remains the same across these examples. Geach, in contrast, holds that there are different identity relations corresponding to these different qualifications.

Frege’s position is that “being the same F as,” like “being a red-haired brother of,” splits up into a general relation and an assertion about the referent; it breaks up into “being the same as” and “being an F .” This is what Geach denies . . . Geach says that “there is no such thing as being just ‘the same’ . . .” (91)

- So, what is the Frege/Perry position on identity?

The view I advocate, and which I believe to be Frege’s, is that the role of the general term is to identify the referents — not to identify the “kind of identity” asserted. (92)

On this view if x and y are the same F , then x and y cannot differ with respect to any other general term (G , H , etc.).

◦ Perry also notes that accepting the Geach position also commits one to abandoning some of the standard logical properties of identity.

II.

• Perry considers Geach's examples. For example, the list of words — A. Bull, B. Bull, C. Cow. Geach says that A is the same word type as B, but A and B are different word tokens. But, Perry notes that there is a problem with this claim (when there is no equivocation between the conjuncts). The problem is that if 'A' and 'B' refer to word tokens throughout (as the second conjunct suggests that they should be understood), then the "sameness" claim in the first conjunct is not an identity claim. So, this wouldn't be a counter-example to the Frege/Perry thesis, then.

◦ Perry notes that not all same-statements are identity-statements.

III.

• Consider the relation $R(a,b)$:

Our choice in interpreting " $R(a,b)$ " is just this: to interpret " a " and " b " as references to word types and " $R(—,—)$ " as "is identical with," or to interpret " a " and " b " as references to *occurrences* of word types (which is to say, as references to word tokens), and " $R(—,—)$ " as expressing one kind of what Geach calls "relative identity" — namely, "is equiform with." (95)

Geach argues that there are ontological benefits (i.e., getting rid of types) to going with the second option.

IV.

• Perry objects that Geach's position goes well beyond the claims of the typical Nominalist:

It seems to me that any cogency that attaches to Geach's claim of pollution can be traced to a confusion of his position with some sort of nominalism. Geach's position seems to presuppose nominalism: the thesis that, in our terminology, only occurrences are ultimately real. But it amounts to far more. The nominalist would claim that "being of the same type" is analyzable in terms of "equiformity" and that references to types are in some sense eliminable; Geach seems to claim that they are not only eliminable, but never occur in the first place. (97)

V.

• Example: Consider a piece of clay that is a statue of George Washington at one time and a statue of Warren Harding at another time. One could claim

that the statue is not identical to the clay that composes it. Perry tolerates this possibility.

VI.

- Summary.