

LOCKE AND THE RELATIVISATION OF IDENTITY

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Are there cases in which an object x is the same F as an object y but x is not the same G as y , even though x is a G ? An affirmative answer will have drastic repercussions on one's account of identity and on one's quantification theory. For suppose that the expression ' x is the same F as y ' can be understood as ' x is an F and y is an F and x is identical with y ', and that ' x is not the same G as y ' can be understood as 'it is not the case that x is a G and y is a G and x is identical with y '. Then one may reason as follows:

1. $Fx.Fy. x=y$
2. $\sim(Gx.Gy. x=y)$
3. Gx
4. Gy from 1, 3
5. $Gx.Gy$ from 3, 4
6. $\sim(x=y)$ from 2, 5
7. $x=y. \sim(x=y)$ from 1, 6

A person who holds that there are cases in which an object x is the same F as an object y but not the same G as an object y , even though x is a G , must *either* deny that ' x is the same F as y ' can be understood as ' x is an F and y is an F and x is identical with y ' and that ' x is not the same G as y ' can be understood as 'it is not the case that x is a G and y is a G and x is identical with y ' *or* deny that the step from 1 and 3 to 4 is valid. Since in many cases, including the example discussed at length below, the truth of ' Gy ' is assumed as a premise, it is the former alternative that is the centre of attention. Adopting this course may lead one to P. T. Geach's doctrine that 'is identical with' is a fragmentary expression which has no significance unless one says or means something of the form 'is the same F as'.¹

John Locke, *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Book II, Ch. 27,

is the most prominent advocate of the view that there are cases in which an object x is the same F as an object y but x is not the same G as y , even though x is a G . One should not conclude that Locke also held Geach's doctrine. It is true that Locke says of identity that

to conceive and judge of it aright, we must consider what idea the word it is applied stands for: it being one thing to be the same substance, another the same man, and a third the same person ... (II, xxvii. 7).

But his point here is merely that the conditions under which identity of a substance preserved differ from those under which identity of a man is preserved, and these in turn differ from those under which identity of a person is preserved. Moreover, the sentence which opens the chapter:

Another occasion the mind often takes of comparing is the very being of things, when, considering anything as existing at any determined place and time, we compare it with itself existing at another time, and thereon form the ideas of identity and diversity ...

is hardly suggestive of Geach's doctrine.

Locke argues as follows. The idea in our minds of which the sound 'man' in our mouths is a sign, is nothing else but of an animal of such a certain form – a living organised body. 'Person' stands for a thinking intelligent being that has reason and reflection and can consider itself as itself, the same thinking thing in different times and places; 'person' is a forensic term. The same man is the same continued life communicated to different particles of matter as they happen successively to be joined to the organised living body. Personal identity depends only on having the same consciousness: as far as consciousness can be extended backwards to any past action or thought, so far reaches the identity of that person. In a given case consciousness might be preserved, while identity of the organised living body was not, or vice versa. Hence there might occur a case in which an object x was the same person as an object y while not the same man as y (II, xxvii. 15), or a case in which x was the same man as y while not the same person as y , i.e. in which the same man at different times made different persons (II, xxvii. 20).

Is Locke correct? Let us take up Locke's own example of the prince and the cobbler (II, xxvii. 15). Suppose that at time t_1 there exists a prince, Charles, in a palace, and a cobbler, Jack, in a shop. Charles is both a person and a man, and so is Jack. At time t_2 the body in the shop acquires a consciousness similar to that of Charles. There then exists in the shop

an object which is both a person and a man, and which can neutrally be dubbed 'A'. The claim is that Charles is the same person as *A* but not the same man as *A*. Locke does not relate what happened to the body in the palace. Suppose that at time t_2 the body in the palace acquires a consciousness similar to that of Jack. Then there exists in the palace an object which is both a person and a man, and which can neutrally be dubbed 'B'. It is claimed that Charles is the same man as *B*, but not the same person as *B*.

My description of the case has several controversial features. Someone might deny that there exists in the palace at t_1 an object which is both a person and a man. There exists in the palace at t_1 a person, and there exists in the palace at t_1 a man. Sometimes 'Charles' is used to name the person, and sometimes the man. *Charles the person* exists in the shop at t_2 , while *Charles the man* exists in the palace at t_2 . Locke's words at II. xxvii. 20 suggest a toying with this idea. However it is not necessary to discuss it here. For someone who says this has given up any claim to have produced a case in which an object x is the same person as object y but x is not the same man as y , even though x is a man.

Geach might say that one is not in a position to use the name 'Charles' unless one is told whether it is the substantival term 'person' or the substantival term 'man' that supplies the sense of the name. This is an application of his view that

for any proper name there is some interpretation of 'X' such that we can truly say 'the continued application of this proper name requires, as part of the sense of the name, that it be always applied to the same X'.²

Would this view, if true, contribute to the defence of Locke's thesis? No.

Consider, together with the passage quoted above, Geach's assertion that

by keeping on using a proper name we mean to refer over and over again to the same 'thing'; but if this is not an intention to keep on referring to the same *A*, for some definite interpretation of '*A*' as a count noun, then, as lawyers say, the intention is void for uncertainty, and we have not managed to refer at all.³

Evidently Geach holds that there are occasions – e.g. when asserting 'Charles is the same person as A' – on which one uses the name 'Charles' with the intention of referring to the same person, i.e. on which it is part of the sense of the name 'Charles' that it is applied to the same person, i.e. on which the word 'person' supplies the 'criterion' of identity for the

referent of the name; and he holds that there are occasions – e.g. when asserting, ‘Charles is the same man as *B*’ – on which one uses the name ‘Charles’ with the intention of referring to the same man, i.e. on which it is part of the sense of the name ‘Charles’ that it is applied to the same man, i.e. on which the word ‘man’ supplies the ‘criterion’ of identity for the reference of the name.⁴ The meaning of ‘Charles’ must vary from one group of occasions to the other.

So what must Geach say about assertion, ‘Charles is the same person as *A* but Charles is not the same man as *A*, even though Charles is a man?’ Presumably in its first and second occurrences ‘Charles’ is intended to refer to the same person; the ‘criterion’ of identity supplied by the word ‘person’ is part of the meaning of the name. Now according to Geach, ‘Charles is a man’ is equivalent to ‘Charles is the same man as something’. So in its third occurrence, ‘Charles’ is intended to refer to the same man; the ‘criterion’ of identity supplied by the word ‘man’ is part of the meaning of the name.⁵ Thus ‘Charles’ has one meaning in its first and second occurrences and a different meaning in its third occurrence, i.e. it is ambiguous. If this is so then the above assertion does not entail that there is an object *x* and an object *y* such that *x* is the same person as *y* but *x* is not the same man as *y* even though *x* is a man. That is, if Geach’s view is correct then the sentence ‘Charles is the same person as *A* but Charles is not the same man as *A* even though Charles is a man’ cannot be used to make a claim of the kind that the Lockean wants to make. (The ‘even though’ clause is important. No doubt Cicero is the same person as Tully but not the same tree; but this truth is uninteresting.)

It might be objected that, while ‘Charles’ differs in *meaning* between its first two occurrences and its third occurrence, its *reference* remains constant, and so one does indeed have an instance of the Lockean thesis. But then why all this talk of the need to fix the meaning of ‘Charles’? Someone who says this cannot object to my description of the prince-cobbler case. The reference of ‘Charles’ was clearly specified: it is the prince, i.e. the person, i.e. the man, who exists in the palace at t_1 .

Given that Geach’s view of proper names cannot be used to defend Locke, one might now hope to proceed with one’s treatment of the case by referring to and discussing Charles without further ado. Where is he at t_2 ?

Someone might interject as follows.

There correspond to the continuant which is the referent of 'Charles', i.e. the prince, i.e. the person, i.e. the man, in the palace at t_1 , two life-histories (occurents) – of a person and of a man respectively. These life-histories coincide at t_1 but diverge at t_2 . Thus one's enquiries to where Charles is at t_2 should indicate whether one is considering him *qua person* or *qua man*. If the former then one will be answered with regard to one life-history; if the latter then the other. Charles, *qua person*, or under the description 'person', exists in the shop at t_2 , while Charles, *qua man*, or under the description 'man', exists in the palace at t_2 . One cannot speak of Charles *tout court*.

It is not clear how assertions about Charles, *qua F*, or under the description '*F*', are to be construed. Part of the claim seems to be as follows. The sentences 'The person in the palace at t_1 is in the shop at t_2 ' and 'the man in the palace at t_1 is in the palace at t_2 ' are both true. The person in the palace at t_1 is a man, and the man in the palace at t_1 is a person. Nevertheless the expressions 'the person in the palace at t_1 ' and 'the man in the palace at t_1 ' are not substitutable for one another *salva veritate* in the above two sentences.

He who makes this claim is committed to saying that:

- (i) There is a person located in the palace at t_1 and in the shop at t_2 .
- (ii) There is not a man located in the palace at t_1 and in the shop at t_2 .

Let us suppose that all persons are men and all men are persons. Then the general terms 'person' and 'man' are in nonextensional position in (i) and (ii) respectively.

The falsity of this view may be illustrated as follows.

Suppose that:

- (a) $(x)(x \text{ is a Z-particle} \equiv x \text{ is a particle having charge } c \text{ and mass } m)$

Consider the assertions,

- (b) There are Z-particles passing through region r_1 at t_1 and through region r_2 at t_2 .

- (c) There are particles having charge c and mass m passing through region r_1 at t_1 and through region r_2 at t_2 .

He who claims that 'person' is in nonextensional position in (i) must say that 'Z-particle' is in nonextensional position in (b). Hence he must deny that from the conjunction of (a) and (b) one can derive (c). Hence he must deny that (b) and (c) can be read respectively as

- (d) $(\exists x)(x \text{ is a Z-particle and } x \text{ passes through region } r_1 \text{ at } t_1 \text{ and } x \text{ passes through region } r_2 \text{ at } t_2)$
 (e) $(\exists x)(x \text{ is a particle having charge } c \text{ and } x \text{ is a particle having mass } m \text{ and } x \text{ passes through region } r_1 \text{ at } t_1 \text{ and } x \text{ passes through region } r_2 \text{ at } t_2)$

since from the conjunction of (a) and (d) one can easily derive (e).

Suppose that a scientist is testing the hypothesis (b). His instruments tell him:

- (f) There are no particles having charge c passing through region r_2 at t_2 .

He reasons as follows:

1. There are no particles having charge c and mass m passing through region r_2 at t_2 – from (f)
2. There are no Z-particles passing through region r_2 at t_2 .
3. There are no Z-particles passing through region r_1 at t_1 and through region r_2 at t_2 .

But if (b) cannot be read as (d) then one cannot derive 3 from 2: the scientist's reasoning is fallacious. That is, the conjunction of his observation-report (f) and his background knowledge (a) does not falsify the hypothesis (b). This result seems sufficiently disastrous to rule out the view that 'Z-particle' is in nonextensional position in (b) and so to rule out the view that 'person' is in nonextensional position in (i).

Let us therefore return to Charles – not Charles-under-a-certain-description or Charles-qua-such-and-such. Charles is the person in the palace at t_1 , i.e. the man in the palace at t_1 . Where is he at t_2 ? How much does he weigh at t_2 ? If Locke is correct then one cannot say of Charles that *he* exists at such-and-such a place at t_2 , or that *he* weighs so much at t_2 .

(Clearly Charles is not both in the shop and in the palace at t_2 – for this would imply that he was a scattered whole that had proper parts in those places; nor does he weigh both 60 kg and 70 kg at t_2 .) All that one can say is that Charles stands in the relative-identity relation ‘is the same person as’ to a certain object which is both a person and a man, which exists in the shop at t_2 and which weighs 60 kg at t_2 , and in the relative-identity relation ‘is the same man as’ to a certain object which is both a person and a man, which exists in the palace at t_2 and which weighs 70 kg at t_2 .

But if Charles isn’t even in the same place as A , then how can he possibly be the same person as A ? (cf. II, xxvii. 1). One need not accept a full-fledged Indiscernibility of Identicals principle in order to feel the force of this question. It might be insisted that, while one cannot say that Charles is in the same place as A at t_2 , one can still say that Charles is the same person as something which exists in the same place as A at t_2 . But of course the same question rears its head: if Charles isn’t in the same place as that thing, then how can he be the same person as it? Moreover, if Charles exists at t_2 at all, then surely he has some determinate location then: he is either in the shop or in the palace or somewhere else.

Charles has a firm location and weight at t_1 : it was then that he was originally picked out and named ‘Charles’. In fact, there is no special problem about his location and weight prior to t_2 . But the Lockean is unable to assign Charles a location or a weight (or a height or a blood-pressure, etc.) at or after t_2 . One concludes that Charles does not exist at or after t_2 at all.

How then could Charles be the same person as A , who does exist at and after t_2 ? I suspect that the belief that this is possible arises from a confusion between the relation ‘is the same person as’ and the relation ‘is a part of the same four-dimensional analogue of a person as’. Suppose that one regarded ‘Charles’ as the name of an occurrent, which occupied a spatio-temporal region bounded on one side by t_2 . Then even though Charles and A had different spatio-temporal locations, there might be various occurrents of which they were both parts. Charles might be part of the same four-dimensional person-analogue as A . But Charles was originally said to be both a person and a man. ‘Charles’ was introduced as the name of a continuant, an object which existed at t_1 , but which also existed at other times in a no less fullblooded way. Given that the con-

tinuant Charles exists before but not after t_2 , while the continuant A exists after but not before t_2 , it follows that Charles is not the same person as A .

I conclude that Locke's argument concerning the prince and the cobbler does not show that there is a case in which an object x is the same F as an object y but x is not the same G as y , even though x is G . It might be said that my choice of the prince-cobbler example was unfortunate, since it has been widely argued that preservation of the same 'consciousness' is neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition of personal identity.⁸ However the general principles of Locke's position did not depend on its being personal identity that was under discussion. One sometimes encounters claims of the kind, 'Statue A is the same piece of bronze as Vase B , but a different work of art'. It is not difficult to adapt my arguments concerning the prince and the cobbler to deal with cases like these.

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NOTES

¹ P. T. Geach, *Mental Acts*, Routledge, 1957, p. 59; and *Reference and Generality*, Cornell University Press 1962, p. 39; and 'Identity', in *Review of Metaphysics* 21 (1967), 3.

² P. T. Geach, *Mental Acts*, Routledge, 1957, p. 71; cf. p. 69.

³ P. T. Geach, 'Identity', in *Review of Metaphysics* 21 (1967), 12. The next sentence is also noteworthy: 'Locke's error on this point has been enormously influential ...'

⁴ The expressions 'substantival term' and 'criterion' are used here in the senses of Geach, *Reference and Generality*, Cornell University Press, 1962, p. 39.

⁵ It might be objected: surely, even on Geach's view, one can say, 'Charles is a man' while intending to refer to the same *person* as previously? Now in the sentence 'Charles is the same man as B ', the name 'Charles' must embody as part of its sense the identity-criterion supplied by 'man' rather than 'person', since otherwise the assertion would be false. Hence in the sentence 'Charles is the same person as A but Charles is not the same man as A , while Charles is the same man as B ', 'Charles' embodies the identity-criterion supplied by 'person' in its first two occurrences, and the identity-criterion supplied by 'man' in its third occurrence. But, *prima facie* at least, 'Charles is the same person as A but Charles is not the same man as A , while Charles is the same man as B ' entails 'Charles is the same person as A but Charles is not the same man as A , even though Charles is a man'. Someone might deny this just on the ground that 'Charles' in its third occurrence in the latter differs in meaning from 'Charles' in its third occurrence in the former, but this position has little to commend it.

⁶ D. Follesdal, 'Quine on Modality', in D. Davidson and J. Hintikka (eds.) *Words*

and Objections D. Reidel Publ. Co. Dordrecht, Holland, 1969, pp. 180ff, defines 'extensional position', distinguishing it from 'referential position'.

⁷ The reasons for saying that *A* exists after but not before t_2 are similar to those for saying that Charles exists before but not after t_2 . Where is *A* at t_1 ? How much did he then weigh?

⁸ e.g. A. Flew, 'Locke and the Problem of Personal Identity', *Philosophy* 26 (1951).