

PROVIDING STABILITY TO OUR WORLD. IDENTITY AND TRANSFERENCE GEACH AND QUINE

Olga RAMÍREZ

ABSTRACT: The problem of identity is central to epistemic transference. However, relative identity appears to be the only way to work out an epistemic useful notion of identity. Relative identity, on its part, is either parasitic on strict identity or not identity at all. If, on the contrary, we ought for a strict concept of identity capable of satisfying its requirements, we end up with a tautologic and epistemic worthless category. The paper provides an answer to this problem, which, while working with a strict notion, shows how it might still serve epistemic purposes. In doing so, it shows how a formal reconstruction of our objectual world and the identities we refer to poses a workable model upon which our messy epistemic one acquires stability. The paper focuses primarily on the Geach-Quine discussion on identity.

KEYWORDS: epistemic transference, identity, Geach, Quine, world stability

1. Knowledge and Transference

The growth of knowledge is principally due to our capacity to transfer what we know of a limited number of cases to many more. The puzzles around this issue are various but mostly centred on legitimising the transference procedure. These problems can go deep into the very grounding of our inferential practices and are a matter of primary relevance. To the question of transference belongs, though, as a previous step, the specification of the nature of the identity relation that serves as the basis of transference processes. This has been a matter of interest in antique thought (Reade 1938, §IX), known as the problem of ‘the one and the many’ and also the centre of some more modern disputes, such as that between Geach (1972) and Quine (1963a, 1963b, 2013) on the interpretation of identity, with an ongoing contemporary discussion following its lead. Although my concern is the justification of transference in general, the focus will be the Quine-Geach dispute, since it allows us to narrow down the problem to certain questions that are especially relevant to my concerns. This need not mean that the abovementioned aspects will not be touched upon, since they are all intimately connected.

2. The Problem. The One and the Many. *E pluribus unum*

Speaking about transference when dealing, for example, with the problem of induction, we tend to ask: what allows us to transfer the characteristics attributed to a given number of cases 'of the sort' to them all? Even when posing the problem in geometrical terms, we ask: how do we know that the results of our measurements about some cube, for example, transfer necessarily from this one to all equal ones?¹ In both cases, we assume that transference is considered in relation to 'equal ones' or tokens 'of the same sort'. However, since we are talking of different particulars or individual tokens, they are, on the one hand, per definition, different; on the other hand, they are already sorted out as *equal* 'cubes' or 'ducks', and the labour of *identification* is pre-done. Furthermore, our very way of posing the problem denotes that, in a sense, we are also taking for granted that it is identity which somehow justifies transference. So, by the same token, identity justifies transference, but considering the plurality concerned, we also wonder whether it should. When we discuss the sameness of something with itself, things appear more straightforward: what belongs to something can be said to belong to it. But how does identity amongst plurals justify transference?

3. Geach and Quine on Identity

Geach's (1972) solution to this problem was to claim that 'all identity is relative identity', so what we are actually saying when we say that two tokens of rabbits *a* and *b*, for example, are the same, is that ' $a = b$ relative to a predicate R (*Rabbit*)'. We are implying that *a is the same R as b*. The predicate establishing this identity relation Geach calls an 'I-predicable'.² He concludes that all identity relations are of this sort, and strict identity does not exist. Quine's (1960, 2013) alternative would postulate that, when we discuss different values taken by the predicate 'Rabbit', to keep with the example, we are quantifying countable unities satisfying the predicate R pertaining to a given language L . We would be saying that the value taken by the predicate in the first case is equal to the value taken by the predicate in the second one, $R_1 = R_2$; in that sense, there is strict identity. I here use numerical indexes to denote that what we are counting are the unities of the predicate, not pre-given

¹I am with this referring to a question posed by C. Wright at the "Basic Knowledge Conference" Aberdeen 16-17 June, 2012. To my knowledge, it is not included in a printed paper I could quote.

²Feldman (1969, 547-548) sees Geach introducing an alternative to the ordinary identity predicate. If the standard absolute identity is expressed in terms of $\alpha = b$, then Geach's proposal in using his *I-predicables* would turn the relation between α and b into $\alpha = Rabbit = b$. I am applying Feldman's reading here in my own example but using his formulation in terms of $a = R = b$. This reconstruction might, however, tend to make things more confusing.

Providing Stability to Our World. Identity and Transference: Geach and Quine individuals, considered from an absolute perspective, satisfying R. However, Quine does not mean by it either that it is the predicates themselves, or some universal version of them, that are counted.

Amongst his arguments against Quine, Geach claims that it would be ontologically disastrous to make quantification dependent on the *I-predicables* of a theory. According to him, this would give rise to a “baroque Meinongian Structure of the Universe” (Geach 1972, 245), where the objects we obtain would depend upon the *I-predicables* that our theories happen to introduce—a view that Quine (1963b) makes poignant in his known claim that “to be is to be the value of a variable”. However, Geach’s rejection of strict identity pretends to base itself on Frege’s defence of the conceptual dependency of any possible counting. No two objects, *a* and *b*, can be equal ‘universally’ but always relative to a concept. However, contrary to appearances, I believe Frege’s idea would be closer to Quine’s proposal than to Geach’s. From the Fregean (1893) counting perspective, there is nothing like being an individual *a*, *on itself*, that is equal to another individual *b* in being an *A*, and possibly unequal, as Geach suggests, in being a *C*. First, this requires a conception of differentiable individuals already independent from any concept, independent of their being an *A*, and stable as such independent unities (in all that is not relative to *A*) to be further counted in different ways. As such, there will always have to be, at least, a first point by which we depart from *pre-fixed* individuals, and then sameness is to be found amongst them in relative regards. But, whilst in this way ontology indeed remains beyond the risk of a crisscrossing of objects of unpleasant sorts, Frege’s (1893) example of the pile of cards³ makes it clear that he means something much more akin to Quine. In order to count (what we first sort as *a*) a pile of cards, one needs to know what one should be counting. One needs “a word”, Frege says: “card”, “game”, “unit of value” ..., in order to count. Accordingly, there would be different quantitative unities depending on the predicate used. On the Fregean view, what we count are *unities* of a predicate, but this amounts to counting identical existential satisfactions of the predicate as those different unities.

From the perspective of counting, the predicate’s satisfaction determines how many. Geach’s proposal, although seeming to adopt a similar perspective with his example of the letters and words of his bookshelf in Leeds (Geach 1972, 242-243) is ultimately taking for granted that the departing domain is not fixed by any specific identity relation defined by an *I-predicate* but taken to be ‘given first’ as if

³ Frege (1893 §22, 24) “Damit das ich ihm den Pack in die Hand gebe, habe ich ihn noch nicht den Gegenstand seiner Untersuchung vollständig gegeben. Ich muss ihm ein Wort: Karte, Spiel, Werteinheit, hinzufügen”

universally characterised—a perspective that Dummett (1991) perfectly stresses based precisely on Geach's bookshelf argument and that both he and Frege reject.⁴

This suggests a different interpretation of Geach's account: one under which 'token word' plays no distinguished role in fixing the domain over which the various relative identity relations are to be defined and under which no other count noun plays such a role; the domain is given *first*, antecedently to our defining over it *any* identity-relation. This is in harmony with the thesis I have already rejected, the thesis which is the main burden of this essay to confute: that a domain may be specified without associating any particular identity relation with it. (Dummett 1991, 181)

In a sense, despite his arguments against universal identity, Geach wishes to keep some ontologically-clear unities that preserve the tidy 'structure of the universe' he defends, amongst which differing relative likenesses and dissimilarities are to be found. However, even if granted, there would be no identity worth its name amongst such individuals. In his view, it is amongst two distinct (and in other aspects potentially very different) individuals that a *specific* relative identity relation, marked by an *I-predicable*, holds. But, then, the identity relation does not hold between *them*. We cannot do away with in-discernability as a requirement for identity and pace arguments to the contrary without depriving the notion of identity of its most basic sense. One cannot apply the term if it is applied under conditions of clear discernibility. Geach, however, wishes to keep the relation of identity amongst these absolute individuals by merely specifying that it is in having a given commonality that they can be *called* equal. But, unless one says that there is something in *a* (an *A*) and there is something in *b* (an *A*) that are equal, and, thus, denies that it is amongst the absolute individuals and rather amongst something *in them* that an identity relation holds, then one is not talking truly. McGuinn (2000) appears to have pursued an argument along these lines, claiming that, for this reason, strict identity would precede relative identity. I feel that this is entirely right since, rigorously taken, the true equality relation holds between *A* and *A* (the *A* in *a* and the *A* in *b*). A statement that attempts to keep identity somehow amongst the preceding distinct individuals is not to be taken literally. Geach makes clear, however, that he does not want his view to be interpreted in Quinean terms and identity to be stated amongst the unities of the quantified predicates—in the case of *A*, the existential values, $A_1=A_2$.

But that sort of strict identity is, at the end of the day, the only identity that could respond to the notion of indiscernibility which we, on pain of otherwise

⁴ I found Dummett's argument posterior to the development of my argument above, but I take it to illustrate, based on Geach's example, the same idea.

Providing Stability to Our World. Identity and Transference: Geach and Quine contradiction, inevitably tie to it. Any pretended 'other notion of identity' is either parasitic upon it in understanding or, in its deep structure, not a true identity. Indeed, this is because it is ultimately through strict identity amongst partial aspects that we can manage inaccurately to say, of two discernible individuals, that some identity relation holds amongst them. Geach (1972, 238) notes that Frege (1893)⁵ also protests that there could be any sort of identity other than strict identity.⁶ Interestingly, though, in some passages of *The Grundlagen* in which he addresses identity, Frege (1884, §34, 31) argues in the following way:

Two objects are never overall equal. On the other side, one can always find a perspective from which two things match each other. So, we landed again in the arbitrary conception, if we don't want to go against the truth of things, prescribe things equality going beyond what corresponds to them.

When I for example, considering a white and a black cat, ignore the characteristics that differentiate them, I obtain the concept 'cat'. When I put them both under this concept and call them unities, remains the white white and the black black.

In the second paragraph, Frege stresses that what is counted and what is considered equal are the unities of the concept 'cat'; their recognised *catness*, so to speak, is equal: C₁ equal to C₂. It would go against "the truth of things", he tells us in the first paragraph, to prescribe identity beyond that, ascribing it to the objects. But is not Frege talking *also* of 'objects', of which it is said that they are never overall equal? Can he then be taken to support Geach's perspective, discussing taken-for-granted objects amongst which we find differences and similarities? I have been arguing that, for both Frege and Quine, identity is strict identity, and this is to be found amongst the unities of the predicates that allow the counting. On the contrary, Geach would depart from objects discernible from the predicates that allow us to sort them out as his unities, finding relative identities amongst them later. Before addressing this question and what appears to be, at least, some confusion in the views attributed to Frege and some of his quoted claims, let me clarify certain other possible reservations that would appear to affect the Quinean and, in this regard, also the Fregean perspective.

Does not conceptual introduction itself require pre-conceptual individuation? One might wonder more radically how we can start counting instantiated unities of predicate *A* if the concept of the predicate, "A", is to be obtained previous to the counting. Are we not required to initially adopt the universal perspective in Geach's

⁵ I follow here Geach's own quote (1972, 238) where he refers to *Grundgesetze V.II., 254*

⁶ Frege's views in "Über Sinn und Bedeutung" regarding the identity of names through the individual referred to make one wonder as to the extent to which he held this. But I think that it may not be incompatible when reconstructing as I shall be proposing.

sense? This would seem to turn the previous critique of Geach's proposal, made by Dummett, back to the critics. Strictly considered, the concept of 'cat' is what allows us to count the concrete unities *of it*. But how do we come to the predicate itself and the corresponding concept? This is nothing less than the question of how concepts are introduced. Independently of what Quine or Frege themselves might have said about it, we can try to answer. In the case of conceptual introduction, we can imagine ourselves gathering some features conforming to what we might call 'a pattern of *catness*' before we can use this pattern to further identify unities of it. But already the pre-conceptual cognition, the distinction of some repeated peculiar commonality, can be said to constitute a given perspective in Frege's sense. It is worked out, if you wish, *from* the world (often departing from some previous conceptual understanding already in place),⁷ but it is, nevertheless, from a cognitive perspective here, too, that we count some *shadowy* pre-conceptual unities. It might be a less determined perspective than a conceptual one, but, nevertheless, it amounts to the sorting out of 'a way of being' to be later conceptually registered. This 'way of being' cannot be understood as a mere fencing out of some items. If we come to sort out differently what we will later call 'clouds' or 'stones', it is because we appreciate their differences in advance; it is a comprehensive sorting out. However, the 'equality' that allows conceptual introduction is, in a sense, under construction—and, if we listen to Wittgenstein, this is always the case, also after institutionalised conceptual practice, since the rule is constituted underway and not pre-fixed. In another sense, though, it is already there to some extent, making it possible. The relevantly common pattern draws its contour on the go, but it can be seen to have been applicable to the previous cases that gave rise to it first. There is, thus, no necessary contradiction between the claim that it is always from a perspective that we count and the acknowledgement that we need to depart from a pre-conceptual reality. Our picture needs to be further enhanced, but for now this should help.

Counting and Physical Objects

Going back to our previous problem, i.e. whether Frege was adopting the 'universal' perspective, let us see how we might understand this. In reconstructing how we understand the world, we distinguish 'physical objects', 'properties' and 'relations'. These distinctions are not blind, but they imply a conception—a comprehension of what it is that we are talking about. When talking about 'physical objects', we have meaningful criteria determining what counts as one. We understand these are separable spatiotemporal unities with given three-dimensional forms, etc. We

⁷ I have worked this some more in Ramírez (2020a, 4-6).

distinguish 'properties' as such because they are further characteristics of physical objects. We know that, when using terms such as 'living beings', we are referring to 'physical objects', the same as with 'cats' and 'dogs'. By their very constitution, dependency and meaning, we consider some more fundamental in structuring the physical spatiotemporal world. There is no contradiction in counting unities of 'physical objects' and counting unities of 'black spots' and considering them both unities. 'Black spots' will *per definition* be already understood as being spots of some physical object. But when one is counting 'blackspots', one is still counting unities of 'black pots', not of 'physical objects' (no matter if they coincide up to a point). It is from the perspective of equality and counting that we require sameness, otherwise our universe admits amongst those counted as 'physical objects' to consider their diverse characteristics (from other perspectives) when we are not interested merely in their counting. To go with Geach's example, we can differentiate from the point of view of counting those *men* that 'have the same surname' for example. We can, so to speak, keep our 'as physical objects' individuated particulars fixed and then consider how them being counted as 'having the same surname' affects them—how many were left out, for example. However, it is only in a derived, rather than literal, sense that we say that "these men are equal in having the same surname"; literally speaking, just the surname John₁ is the same as the surname John₂. To say that they are equal *in a sense* whilst being completely discernible is not helpful, because this makes the very meaning of the notion of identity confusing. 'Having the same surname' already requires being a 'physical object' and 'a living being'; these are ordered hierarchies in our world structuring that our concepts reflect: categorical distinctions come first. Some predicates require and presuppose the stable consideration of others. It is physical objects, that 'are cats', or 'have names', or are 'furniture in front of the TV'. But, again, when we count 'furniture in front of the TV', we count *these*. There is no issue in saying that amongst those sorted out as 'physical objects', other predicates apply, such as being 'furniture' or 'white', since, at that moment, we are not considering their equality (just presupposing it to distinguish further aspects). The fact that when I count 'physical objects' I focus on their three dimensionality and spatiotemporal extension does not mean that, free from the labour of counting them, I should not focus on other differences in the world and amongst them. As can be derived from my previous discussion regarding conceptual introduction, I do not defend the position that it is only conceptually that we have access to the world, but, again, it is always by cognitively distinguishing *in some sense* that we can individuate.

But did I not previously say that it was a problem that Geach would depart from discernible objects amongst which he found similarities and dissimilarities?

How is this different from what I am now defending and from the Fregean position? The point is that we could not attribute to Geach the view that he first characterises ‘physical objects’ and then, amongst them, ‘cats’ since, in his case, we would have to say that some *given* individuals are *relatively* identical in being ‘physical objects’. There is no strict equality to start with that could provide us with unities which are equal; this is the main difference. If, despite that, we try to say he departs from physical objects that are equal in being ‘cats’, then the equality relies on the unity ‘physical object’ and not the unity ‘cat’, which is, as in Frege, the only thing that could be equal. This is a problem that we would not see affecting the Fregean position.

What Is It that We Are then Counting?

Here comes the most conflictive point, since by counting unities of predicates such as ‘black spots’ or ‘surnames’, or ‘physical objects’ or ‘mereological sums of nose+table in a room’, or even counting ‘fictional creatures’, we would be situating them all at the same level; they are all unities. But what do we mean by this? If we opt for an interpretation of unities as objects, whatever we count as ‘black spots’, ‘physical objects’ or ‘mereological sums’ are all ‘objects’ just the same. The dependency relations amongst them appear to be obviated, and they would all be something like undifferentiated real objects. This is the monstrous Meinongian world Grice fears.

From Quine’s perspective, one would think that the unities would be understood as ‘objects’. Quine is known to have defended the objectual interpretation of quantifiers, and so whatever our predicates range over, they are objects. But this is, to some extent, misleading. Quine (2013) is also known for his dislike of second-order logic. Therefore, the existent individuals that are cats, as in $\exists(x)C(x)$, and their having the property of ‘having blackspots’, play different roles in a sentence. Whilst the first are objects, the second are not. He disagrees with interpretations that express a second-order commitment to the *property of having black spots*, $\exists(P)Bsp(P)$, as well as with one that understands the commitment to cats in terms of a commitment to kinds and corresponding universals. He alleges, in Quine (2013, §40), that in doing so, we would be treating predicates as if they were names of objects. He allows, however, first-order variables to apply to sets, arguing that this was ultimately what second-order logic referred to. What about the mereological sum case? No theory could claim that such a *kind* exists from Quine’s perspective. However, if a theory should commit to objects satisfying such characteristics occupying the variable role, these would count as objects. It is just unlikely that any theory should do so. Another issue is whether this explanation alone settles all questions and allows a proper ordering of our universe.

A question may well arise here: although for Quine the values of bound variables are not to be understood as instantiation of universals, if we take them as quantifiable unities of the predicate amongst which strict identity is to be possible, as Frege argues, how are they to be understood precisely? Put differently, what do we quantify with the predicate 'cat' from those sorted out existential individuals but their *catness*, whichever characteristics identify anything as such? Quine need not commit to kinds or universals, but, in a way, it is the exhibiting of the identifying characteristics of 'cats' that is quantified. Thus, if we do not go any further than this, it appears to be an 'instantiated kind or sortal' we are committing to. That is, whilst Geach will wish to preserve independent absolute individuals having in common their *catness* and through it a relation of relative identity, it appears that, for Quine, there is strict identity, because all we individuate with the predicate are instances of a kind, such as *catness-1*, *catness-2*, ... *catness-n*. Furthermore, what the concept is understood to mean is, ultimately, a bunch of (common to all) predicates whose existential instantiation we prove before choosing our object. If, on the other hand, objects such as mereological sums or numbers could be included in our theories' ontological commitments, with no way to give precedence to the ones over the others, beyond whether they do or do not belong to our best theories, then Geach's worries are not entirely out of view.

In Frege's case, things appear even worse, since he expanded the possibility of counting to all sorts of spheres—fictional spheres as well as abstract or physical ones. Anything that might be counted fits the bill. However, for him, too, the distinction between objects and functions, between concepts and their existential fulfilment, was designed to prevent the first from being understood objectively. Indeed, the fatal exception was made to allow sets to function as objects, which themselves allowed saturation through other sets as objects. However, without entering this last problem, the mere allowance that anything counted should be indiscriminately considered an object just the same would seem to pose a problem in itself.

Although, perhaps, if we follow the line pursued previously, appealing to the transparency of meanings, a more fruitful treatment of these questions becomes available. The fact that the concepts we use to sort out individuals are meaningful to us, i.e. that we do understand and differentiate what it is that we are sorting out each time, is not irrelevant. Pursuing this line, we might distinguish, first of all, between mere 'formal objects', understanding as such all those countable unities of whichever concept, and 'physical objects', understood in the ordinary sense of three-dimensional, separable, space-time figures.⁸ Clearly, not all formal objects are

⁸ I am aware of the difficulties that the definition of what counts as a 'physical object' encounters in the philosophical discussion. However, for the purposes of the contrast with mere formal

physical objects, although physical objects themselves can be understood primarily as formal ones. For something to count for us under the category of a 'physical object', certain conditions must be met; for something to be a 'cat', it must be a 'physical object', etc. Certain properties, or perhaps *tropes*, might be countable, too, but we understand that they belong to physical objects whilst they do not meet the requirements of physical objects themselves. The dependency relations and hierarchical orders that are important to provide structure to our world are made possible through this understanding. Basic categorical structures and relations pave the way for our spatial ordering of the world, and events are ordered through time; just when we forget what we already know⁹ and mix up formal orderings with what they are *about*, we come to much bewilderment. Far from solving all puzzles, this could do away with some of those which, like the above, are due to the mixing of perspectives.

A few clarifications are still required. What I mean by 'formal objects' is not to be put together with the idea of 'abstract objects'. 'Formal objects', as is here meant, are the unities resulting from conceptual individuation. Whilst physical objects are, in that sense, also formal objects, per transparency we know that their unities fulfil the mentioned spatiotemporal and material characteristics, whilst, for example, counted unities of fictional concepts do not. Physical objects, though, would in no way be considered abstract objects, since abstract objects are defined in opposition to them.

Our resulting situation is, then, the following: we have supported, against Geach, 1) the idea that, when we talk about identity, if it is to be consistent with the main notion expressed by this concept (otherwise, we are not talking about it or we are relying implicitly upon it), then we are talking about strict identity, and 2) this is to be found not amongst some independent objects, but only amongst the unities of the predicates that make the identity statement true. However, 3) there is an issue pertaining to the understanding of these unities themselves: first, regarding their understanding as a whole, as we just saw, and, second, I wish to add now, regarding

counted unities of whichever predicate, the common-sense notion in something like the lines proposed should do.

⁹ This might sound too optimistic; one might think that precisely because we do not know what physical objects are, what properties are, what kinds are, etc., we have to pose the question again. But, while we might question their nature, what it is that they exemplify and how, we do depart from the transparent understanding of our concepts and what they refer to in the particular cases, and amongst them recognise those we count as properties, for example. There is already enough understanding in place regarding conceptual relations to provide much more than the understanding of unities, but also what they are about in terms of the concepts that range over them.

the very suggestion that we could unproblematically talk about strict identity in their case. In terms of the first part of 3), we have already considered the status of these counted unities and how they relate to Geach's question about the ordered structure of the universe. A further issue remains here that concerns the very nature ascribable to those we have regarded *prima facie* as 'formal objects'. This is the next question we need to deal with before addressing the second part of 3) the very possibility of strict identity amongst unities.

Understanding Unities

In considering the nature of what we have regarded in general terms as 'formal objects', it might be useful to first sort out the landscape. Remaining at a formal-representational level, I think we do have the resources to make all the relevant distinctions we need. First, concepts allow us to sort out unities of a given type; they also allow us to think about potential unities (non-saturated variables): "there might be three elephants in the room". Their true application, however, amounts to finding countable existential saturations of them. Now, in seeing them as cases of the concept, we see them as equal unities of it. These unities are the formal objects we have been referring to. This is, so far, nothing but Frege (1884). Second, and here we depart, to some extent, from Frege, these objects are, in a sense, the ontological grounds of our ontology and are not further saturable or *dense*. They are, as I shall put it, the representatives of existential objects, since they cannot be those objects themselves, and we must be able to think *about them* beyond the direct experience of them. Transparency, then, allows us to devise what it is that, each time, is meant by them. Third, regardless of what our predicates are about, the resulting unities are equally understood as representational symbols of them when we count, and so if we were to count 'predicates' themselves for whichever purpose, these too must be understood as (dense) objectual symbols. Indeed, how we are to make sense of this idea remains to be explained. So far, based upon the formal distinctions considered, if what we count are separable observable and ordered '3d-spatiotemporal physical objects' in space, then we already have a conceptual (and categorical) perspective from which to sort them out. If we take them as the objects in our ontology, then they too are formal dense symbols that allow quantification under the category '3-d-physical spatiotemporal' object.

The Purpose of Strict Identity

Now we are ready to handle the second part of 3) above. The worry was whether the identity amongst the unities of a predicate could be understood as strict identity. Could we not say that the identity amongst the particular unities of some predicate

A, such as A_1, A_2, A_3 is not yet a case of strict identity either, or, maybe, even a further case of ‘relative identity’? Ultimately, each particular would be a spatiotemporally-different object, occupying a different space and not strictly the same. This was the initial problem of ‘the one and the many’. Conversely, however, if we adopt a more radical, strict notion of identity, would it not be wholly uninformative and tautological, something that, from the perspective of gaining knowledge through transference, is completely uninteresting? This issue is, indeed, the main problem with accounts of identity. Thus, we come to an impasse: either acknowledge that not even our supported reconstruction meets the criteria of strict identity and, correspondingly, lower our requirements, or adopt a fully-uninformative notion whose epistemic role appears irrelevant. An important argument used in favour of Geach’s relative identity was precisely this. Just relatively understood identity appears to be helpful for the purpose of knowledge gain. Otherwise, what should its interest be?

However, perhaps we should explore another path and consider whether the purpose of stating strict identity is not primarily to aid our epistemic endeavours,¹⁰ although, secondarily, it still may. In fact, I would say that strict identity is just to be had at the formal level. Indeed, this is because even the movement of a particular concrete entity through space and time can amount to the loss or gain of properties¹¹ and the same could be said to go for concrete instantiations of properties, or tropes, by which (when no other differences are to be remarked, such as lesser ‘whiteness’ or ‘weaker resistance to break’ for example) differing timely locations avoid complete identification. The purpose of introducing strict identity, in contrast, might be simple identification: to say that for some particular existential individual φ (represented at the formal level symbolically as the object φ) to be what it is, that is φ , it must differentiate itself (be discernible) from what is other than φ , that is $\neq \varphi$ (represented symbolically as $\neq \varphi$). Therefore, necessarily, our existent individual φ is our (from experience now independent) symbolic object φ only if it is not the other (experience independent) symbolic object $\neq \varphi$. Put differently, if our existential φ is identifiable with φ , then it is not identifiable with $\neq \varphi$. That is, $\varphi \leftrightarrow \text{not } \neq \varphi$. From here we conclude that existential φ is the symbolic object $\varphi \leftrightarrow = \varphi$. It is equal to that symbolic object (and no other) and, thus, we arrive at: necessarily, existential φ is symbolic object φ when this symbolic object is just that same symbolic object (and no other) $\varphi = \varphi$, without this being non-informative.

¹⁰ The proposed reconstruction of the purpose of identity builds, with some slight (though significant) variation, upon Ramírez (2020b, 172) and a previous study from 2014.

¹¹ Even the instant identification of one concrete thing with itself implies a time-lapse of difference and, in truth, takes place at the symbolic level (Ramírez 2020c, 404).

Although it might sound cryptic, this is useful information from the perspective of our identification of an individual at the symbolic level. Leibniz Law would then be merely saying that, if some other individual ω (which we might represent symbolically as ω) is not discernible from φ , and thus is not $\neq \varphi$, given that **not** $\neq \varphi \rightarrow \varphi$, then the individual identified as ω is the individual identified as φ . This would be a way of making sense of tautological identity as an informative way of re-identifying individuals at the symbolic level of thought as the same individual. I am here not talking about ‘names’ of objects, but of what we take to be the object itself—an object that, unlike our experience of it at different points in time, remains stable. This is what I take identity laws to be doing. We will soon see how this can be useful.

Strict Identity and Epistemic Transference Processes

The question is whether this allows us to explain how to deal with our previous problem—how it is that, by serving ourselves of the notion of identity, we can consider transference plausible in our epistemic transactions. Let us return to the occasions where the use of identity in transference processes was normally seen as helpful and informative. We might distinguish the following cases: 1) the identity of an individual throughout space and time; 2) the identity of different tokens amongst themselves, and, perhaps, 3) the (relative) ‘identity’ of *types*, men and chimpanzees, for example. We have already abandoned the temptation to go along with Geach’s reading of these cases in terms of relative identity, considering that it keeps talk of a *specific* identity amongst objects when, in truth, it is identity amongst aspects of objects, if it is to be identity at all. We reencountered the problem, though, affecting even the particular unities of a predicate in the Fregean and Quinean reading. Our aim now is to ascertain whether the formal distinctions introduced previously, together with the differentiation of levels just considered, could provide some insight into these difficulties. Let us go case by case, trying to reconstruct in which sense identity is predicated and what is said by it.

Case 1) The identity of an individual throughout space and time

1. $\alpha^{\circ} \left(\alpha_{\frac{s}{t_1}} \right)$
2. $\alpha_{\frac{s}{t_2}} \text{ not } \neq \alpha^{\circ}$
3. **not** $\neq \alpha^{\circ} \rightarrow \alpha^{\circ}$
4. $\alpha^{\circ} \left(\alpha_{\frac{s}{t_2}} \right)$
5. $\alpha^{\circ} = \alpha^{\circ}$,
6. $\alpha^{\circ} \left(\left(\alpha_{\frac{s}{t_1}} \right) \wedge \left(\alpha_{\frac{s}{t_2}} \right) \right)$

* where α° represents the permanent formal symbolic object identified with the spatiotemporal object $\alpha_{\frac{s}{t_1}}$ at time t_1 and since the spatiotemporal object at time t_2 , $\alpha_{\frac{s}{t_2}}$, is not (in reconstructing its situation at s/t_1 and, possibly, the spatiotemporal continuity that led to s/t_2) $\neq \alpha^{\circ}$, and what is **not** $\neq \alpha^{\circ} \rightarrow \alpha^{\circ}$ we have that $\alpha_{\frac{s}{t_2}}$ is also α° . Given that $\alpha^{\circ} = \alpha^{\circ}$, and that at the representational symbolic level, both $(\alpha_{\frac{s}{t_1}})$ and $(\alpha_{\frac{s}{t_2}})$ can be seen as the same α° , we can conclude that α° represents both $(\alpha_{\frac{s}{t_1}})$ and $(\alpha_{\frac{s}{t_2}})$. It is important to notice that this is not the same as saying that they are equal relative to some aspect of them. If we consider that we are the ones who fix a formally dense individual as existent and persistent whilst it disappears for large periods of time and reappears again, it makes complete sense that it is a cognitive symbol of it that continues to keep permanency. The symbol keeps constant, not through identity but through representation—the individual we are talking about. Our object α° is not a class embracing spatiotemporal slices or stages (Lewis, 1986); it is also not saturable, nor an aspect of those experiential appearances of which we could ask whether it is the same in different locations. It symbolises a permanent object that we can formally get out of disconnected experiences. It integrates them into a cognitively-fixed object.

It might seem that in this way I much too easily do away with all the problems that fill our literature concerning the reidentification of transitions of individuals through time due to the modification of their properties. How do we determine whether or not an individual $\alpha_{\frac{s}{t_2}}$ should still be identified with α° . How many properties can be gained or lost? Which are essential and which are not? Are those not the real epistemic problems? Perhaps, but this is not *my* problem. My problem is to determine what it means—how it is possible that, given such variances, we can knowingly claim there to be an identity between those we *choose* to call the same. How is it that we can claim to refer to the same object? I believe we can do this by posing a formal representative symbolic object.

Case 2) the identity of different tokens amongst themselves

1. $\mathbf{A}^{\circ} (\mathbf{A}^{\circ 1})$
2. $\mathbf{A}^{\circ 2} \text{ Not } \neq \mathbf{A}^{\circ}$
3. $\text{Not} \neq \mathbf{A}^{\circ} \rightarrow \mathbf{A}^{\circ}$
4. $\mathbf{A}^{\circ} (\mathbf{A}^{\circ 2})$
5. $\mathbf{A}^{\circ} = \mathbf{A}^{\circ}$
6. $\mathbf{A}^{\circ} (\mathbf{A}^{\circ 1} \wedge \mathbf{A}^{\circ 2})$

The case here is similar to the previous case, although in contrast we have to do with two objects considered already as permanent objects, two different tokens of a predicate, that must be represented at the symbolic level by two objects, A^{q1} and A^{q2} . I use capital **As** now to keep the idea that, although we are talking about objects, and thus the use of $^{\circ}$ to express objects, we are referring to them as two tokens of the same predicate.¹² Otherwise, we proceed analogously. These instantiated unities of a predicate are also to be represented as dense symbols. The instantiated A^{q1} is already considered a permanent symbolic object (gained through the procedure in case 1). The same is to be said of the instantiated object A^{q2} . Now, we cannot say of them that they are equal in some aspect, nor that it is the particular tokens of the same predicate that are equal since they represent different individuals. How are we to understand it then? Analogously as before, we can understand that A^{q1} can be symbolically represented by the higher order object A° . Since A^{q2} is **not** $\neq A^{\circ}$ (representing whether we would be ready to exclude it from the conceptual application of “A”), and what is **Not** $\neq A^{\circ} \rightarrow A^{\circ}$ we have that A^{q2} is also A° , given that $A^{\circ} = A^{\circ}$, and that at the representational symbolic level, both A^{q1} and A^{q2} can be seen as the same A° ; we can thus conclude that A° represents both A^{q1} and A^{q2} . As before, this is not the same as talking about identity holding amongst instantiation of ideas or particular realisations of them; identity is made possible by identifying both cases with the same representational dense symbolic object, which remains identical no matter the possible differences amongst cases.

To see the point of this reconstruction, consider the following: previously, we were saying that the application rule of some predicate, in Wittgenstein’s terms, is experience-dependent and elusive (at least in experience-dependent concepts). That is, we have to do with a possibly evolving application pattern. Therefore, just as with our experience of spatiotemporal objects, we need to refer to them as permanent and identical in our further thinking; even if they disappear from experiential detection for long periods of time, might change in their properties, etc., it makes sense to think that we should be doing the same with such evolving patterns at the formal level of thought. What we refer to with the different instantiations, i.e. what cognitively identifies them, can be here too symbolically represented as a permanent higher order dense object A° . It is not the concept, since the concept amounts to a class of individuals, but the common idealised pattern of the class that the concept sorts out. So here, too, the representation is the representation of an object

¹² In the previous Case 1, the object is also to be thought of as being first detected from a conceptual perspective, but we then focus on its permanent identity as a token of whichever predicate it might be.

representing the application pattern of the concept. The idea is that we differentiate between the concept or class of individuals through which we determine a pattern that allows us to sort out and identify further individual class members, and the symbolic representation of this pattern as stable for pragmatic purposes. We could say that *big A^o* is the unity that cognitively identifies and represents (as before) both *A^{o1}* and *A^{o2}*. If we were to simply say that *A^{o1}* and *A^{o2}* belong to the same class, we would be getting Geach's case back, saying that they are equal relative to some class, or, in the version attributed to Quine, that they are not the same, since, at a spatiotemporal level, they are not the same. Let us now consider the last case on our list.

Case 3), the (clearly relative) 'identity' of *types*.

We have stated that unities, objects, are such with respect to a concept. We want to say that *big A^o* is a kind of dense objectual unity. But what kind of unity could *A^o* be? It is not a unity of the concept since these are the tokens of it, the 9 or 18 Jupiter moons. I have defended that it is the ideal pattern determined by the concept, but it is not a unity of it since it is through it that individual instances are determined. This pattern distinguishes itself from what is different from it $\neq A^o$, that is, what would not be accepted as referred to by the same concept. Thus, we can perhaps say that, meta-linguistically, we distinguish unities of 'conceptual patterns' to express that we are not talking about classes but about what makes a class different from another, and a *type* different from another. From that perspective, *big A^o* is an objectual unity representing a class too, and we could talk in second-order logic of specific kinds of objects which are not classes nor a plurality of individuals, and which have their peculiar symbolic kind of existence, thereby depicting a hierarchical ontological structure. This has the further advantage of allowing us to get rid of the mystifying concept of universals, reducing it to a symbolic stable representation of the plural instantiations of a concept and the evolving pattern thereof.

We cannot otherwise pursue an analogy of the previous kind, since two different patterns cannot be identical, except if the patterns of two different concepts should be coincident, in which case we could proceed in like manner. However, usually, all we could find between patterns is 'relative identity', that is, identity amongst parts of them. Otherwise, we might want to go on seeing specific patterns as unities of the general class 'types' and then represent these as symbolic objects for some purpose. There are no limits to the possible use of hierarchical objectification for formal purposes.

Is this any good? Is it helpful? I think it has the following benefits: i) It allows us to solve the problem regarding the epistemic worth of identity attributions for purposes of transference without devaluating the concept of identity, as was the case

in Geach's account. In our scheme, it is because we are reasoning at the formal representational level that, in cases 1 and 2 above, we are coherently and truly identifying the same representational object in different existential occasions (be it different timely experiences of the object or different tokens of the same pattern). Therefore, the attributed properties associated with it should be there wherever it is. I come back to this in the next section. ii) It also solves the problem of 'the one and the many', as it reappears for the Quinean alternative reconstruction when talking about the identity of different tokens of a predicate, since no true identity appears to be possible for a plurality. Quine (1960, 2013, 5-7)¹³ had, however, his own way of dealing with 'the one and the many', *E pluribus unum*, in a naturalistic way. This is interesting since, in a different sense, he gives an answer appealing to the construction of an 'objective pattern'. In our proposal, this objective pattern becomes a representative common formal object. It is, then, because each instantiation is cognitively identifiable with the same object that we can speak truly of identity. For me it is here that the true sense of identification as identification of one and the same is made possible. Whether the same can be claimed of Quine's proposal, I would not assume. 3) It allows us to get rid of the obscure notion of universals whilst using its unifying force in a purely formal way. 4) It allows us to quantify over predicates by turning them into objects instead of classes, avoiding other problems. I think these are all worthwhile benefits.

But are we not, per representation, allowing ourselves to think about our muddy reality with a perfection that it lacks and coming to conclusions in our ideal reasoning procedures that, when transferred to the reality we think about, still as non-ideal as before, might drive us potentially to false attributions excused on ideal identities? This could be so, especially in the second case, for example, of attribution to new tokens the properties of the previous ones per identification with the same objectual pattern. I would respond to this by saying that our labour is to try to confer to our reality some stable structures that make it manageable for us—that makes thinking possible. It is our own thinking that requires identifying objects as the same, unifying them through common patterns, associating those unified patterns

¹³ Here his explanation:

The objective pull will regiment all the responses still as 'red', by activating myriad corrective cues. These corrective cues are used unconsciously, such is the perfection of our socialisation; a painter has even to school himself to set them aside when he tries to reproduce his true retinal intake. The uniformity that unites us in communication and belief is a uniformity of resultant patterns overlying a chaotic subjective diversity of connections between words and experience. (Quine 2013, 7)

with certain properties and then backwards transferring to all that is *identified* as the same—the same associated characteristics.

Transference

If we consider the difference between mathematical and experientially-dependent inductive cases, and we go now into the problem of transference, we can see how the first poses the thinking guidelines upon which the second moulds itself.

In the geometrical case, for example, we were wondering how we know that the measurements taken from a single cube should apply to all.¹⁴ One answer that might be given here is to say that:

- a) Tokens C_1 and C_2 are equal as particular tokens or instantiations of the same predicate “C”; therefore, per Leibniz Law (understood as a device of transference based on an imperfect identity amongst tokens), what applies to the one applies to the other. This option could be seen to correspond to the Quinean one.
- b) A second option would be to say, with Geach, that O_1 is the same C as O_2 , since C has x measurements, and C is part or is the universal that O_1 and O_2 have in common, common attributions could be made on that basis.
- c) Our favoured alternative now is this: C° is the objectual pattern that identifies C_1 ; C° is also the objectual pattern that identifies C_2 , $C^{\circ} = C^{\circ}$. Since it is about the pattern that a further discovery is made, C° is ζ and C_1 and C_2 are identifiable with it, ζ applies to them too. Interestingly, the initial question “How do we know that the properties necessarily transfer?” does not pose itself here, since our link C° is ζ is from the beginning on made with the identified pattern, and it requires no new inference to say that it applies to whatever allows identification with C° .

This example refers to geometrical figures, but in the inductive case, we could make the same distinctions. We need not reconstruct the three options again, since we were already working with inductive cases of predicates before and it would be repetitive. It is interesting to consider that, here too, we can do without generalising inferences from one case to many. However, there are relevant differences with the mathematical case when it comes to a) the obtention of the objectual pattern and b) the ascription or association to it of further properties. Regarding a), we have already defended that we have to do with an elusive and continuously-revised pattern obtained based on experience, and so here the objectual pattern we obtain is an idealisation that, in the mathematical case, is not needed. Instead, I take our labour

¹⁴ See footnote 1.

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of conceptual stabilisation is an attempt to obtain, in our muddy experience, the same kind of stability that we can obtain in geometrical cases. These last ones provide the cognitive standard on whose basis we model our ordering procedures. Regarding b), the dissimilitude is even more significant, we thus say that, whilst the connection between the cube and its measurements is necessary, we could hardly say the same in the inductive case. Attributed properties or further relations in experientially-based inductive cases are known to be a posteriori, dependent upon experience, and, possibly, put into question by it. So, here, whilst the connection between the pattern \mathbf{A}° and some ζ cannot be seen as necessary, we do as if it were, as long as it goes, reproducing the same link *as if* it were necessary in some idealising form, which for pragmatic purposes proves very useful. We tend to create a complex pattern, \mathbf{A}° -is- ζ altogether, that we will then see prima facie as applying with whatever we identify with \mathbf{A}° ; moreover, the exciting thing is that we are rewarded by so thinking.

The conclusion is that we provide distinctions and work with identifications and idealisations to which our mathematical and geometrical thinking easily conform as providing the scheme of our very thinking about the world, and then the world we such stabilise appears to respond quite fittingly, rewarding us with knowledge.

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Olga Ramírez

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