

## 11.4 The Identity of Animals and People (a) (p. 288)

### *The Same Club*

SUPPOSE THAT A CLUB ceases its regular meetings. Several years later, some of the members form a club with the same name and the same rules. Is this the same club as before, which has suffered (like my university [see p. 279]) a temporary non-existence? Or is this club a brand-new one, with the same name and rules, and some of the same members?

The answer to this question isn't clear, even though you know all the facts of the case that can possibly be relevant. The members can decide on whatever answer they like, but this would be arbitrary. The question seems to be *empty*—recall our discussion of empty questions in Chapter I (p. 27).

Derek Parfit proposes this as an analogy to the question about Amoeba-man. He thinks that question is empty too, and can be answered only arbitrarily.<sup>1</sup>

Fred is making love to his friend's wife when he hears the husband open the front door, and he dashes into the closet. The husband comes in, opens the closet to hang up his jacket, and discovers Fred standing there naked. "What are you doing here?" he asks. Fred replies, "Everyone's gotta be somewhere."<sup>2</sup>

"Be yourself" is about the worst advice you can give some people.—Tom Masson

---

<sup>1</sup> Derek Parfit, *Reasons and Persons* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984).

<sup>2</sup> This old joke is retold in Thomas Cathcart and Daniel Klein's book, *Plato and a Platypus Walk into a Bar* (New York: Abrams Image, 2006), p. 116. They say it illustrates something about Hegel's philosophy, because Fred takes his friend to be asking "Why is anybody anywhere rather than nowhere?", a question, they say, "that only makes sense if you're a lofty German philosopher like Hegel." The joke has been immortalized (sort of) by being built into the lyrics of a country/western song called "Everybody's Got to Be Somewhere."