



OXFORD JOURNALS
OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS

ANALYSIS

Lewis on Perdurance versus Endurance

Author(s): E. J. Lowe

Source: *Analysis*, Vol. 47, No. 3 (Jun., 1987), pp. 152-154

Published by: [Oxford University Press](#) on behalf of [Analysis Committee](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3328678>

Accessed: 06-03-2016 19:14 UTC

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp>

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.



Oxford University Press and Analysis Committee are collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Analysis*.

<http://www.jstor.org>

according to which worlds are maximal actually existing abstract objects have great difficulty in explaining representation (PW pp. 174–91). But while it would certainly be ironic if the attempt to combine realism about worlds with counterpart theory ran into difficulty over representation, I do not see that Lewis's realism would be compromised by complicating the account of representation in the minimal way of (5).

104, Social Science Building,
Tulane University, New Orleans,
Louisiana 70118, U.S.A.

© GRAEME FORBES 1987

LEWIS ON PERDURANCE VERSUS ENDURANCE

By E. J. LOWE

DAVID Lewis has recently presented a new argument (or perhaps only a new version of an old argument) to the conclusion that things which persist through change must do so by virtue of possessing *temporal parts* (see his *On the Plurality of Worlds*, Oxford. Blackwell, 1986, pp. 202 ff.). In his terminology, 'something *perdures* iff it persists by having different temporal parts, or stages, at different times, though no one part of it is wholly present at more than one time; whereas it *endures* iff it persists by being wholly present at more than one time' (p. 202). In these terms, his conclusion is then that ordinary changeable things like people and puddles (his examples) *perdure* rather than *endure*. This is a conclusion I very much want to resist, chiefly because I find the notion that such things *have* 'temporal parts' scarcely intelligible. Lewis suggests that this disqualifies people like me from entering the debate over perdurance versus endurance, because one cannot debate something one doesn't (or purports not to) understand. However, it isn't that I don't understand the notion of a temporal part as such — I understand it perfectly well as applied to *events* or *processes* — it's just that I dispute its applicability to entities in the category of *continuants*. Anyway, I *shall* enter the debate. I should just say, though, that in seeking to resist Lewis's conclusion, I don't mean necessarily to endorse the suggestion that things like people or puddles do in fact *endure*, as *Lewis* defines this term. This is because I can find no useful application for the notion of such a thing being 'wholly present' at a time, any more than I can for that of its being 'partially non-present' (in the sense, of course, of having earlier or later parts). (Certainly, I don't find talk of a thing's being 'wholly present' at any time at which it exists a

perspicuous way of denying that the notion of temporal parts is applicable to it.) All I am concerned to do, then, is to resist the contention that such things 'perdure'.

Lewis's argument turns on what he calls the 'problem of temporary intrinsics':

Persisting things change their intrinsic properties. For instance shape: when I sit, I have a bent shape; when I stand, I have a straightened shape. Both shapes are temporary intrinsic properties; I have them only some of the time. How is such change possible? (pp. 203-4)

Lewis says that he knows of only three possible solutions. The first is to deny that shapes are genuine intrinsic properties, saying instead that they are 'disguised relations, which an enduring thing may bear to times' (p. 204). I can agree with Lewis that this solution (which would seem to represent a thing's *shape* at a time as being somewhat akin to its *age* at a time) is untenable. The second is to say that 'the only intrinsic properties of a thing are those it has at the present moment' (ibid.), the implication being a denial of the reality of both the past and the future. Again I can agree that this solution is untenable. Lewis's third solution is the one he favours: 'the different shapes ... belong to different things' (ibid.), these different things being precisely different *temporal parts* of the changeable, persisting thing, which therefore *perdures* rather than *endures*. Thus one temporal part of me has a bent shape, another a straightened shape.

However, these three candidate solutions do not exhaust the field. There is another candidate which, in my view, squares far better with common sense than any so far mentioned. To simplify its presentation, I shall consider first not the changing shape of a *person*, but rather the changing shape of a rather simpler object, *O*, consisting of two flat, rigid wooden planks P_1 and P_2 joined endwise by a hinge. At one time *O* may have a bent shape and at another it may have a straightened shape, just as Lewis says of himself. How is this possible? The answer is quite obvious: at one time P_1 and P_2 are at an angle to one another and at another they are in alignment. *O*'s changing *shape* is to be explained in terms of the changing spatial *relations* between its constituent parts, P_1 and P_2 , whose own shapes (we have been assuming) are unchanging. *O*'s shape at any given time is *not*, then, a relation (not, in particular, a 'disguised' temporal relation), but it does 'supervene' upon the shapes and spatial relations of its constituents at that time. And as it is with *O*, so it is more complicatedly with more complex objects like people.

This explanation of *O*'s changing shape presupposed, it is true, that P_1 and P_2 were rigid, so that *their* shapes were unchanging. But there is no reason why we shouldn't allow them too to change in shape, explaining this in turn in terms of the shapes and changing spatial relations of *their* constituent parts. (Notice that when I

speaking here of 'parts' of changeable objects, I mean this in the ordinary, common-sense way in which P_1 and P_2 are *parts* of O ; I am not speaking of 'temporal' parts.) Now, obviously, we have set out here upon a *regress* – but it isn't at all obvious that it must be a *vicious infinite* regress. The regress can perfectly well be terminated at a level of *fundamental particles*, which have all their intrinsic properties *unchangeably*. Classical atoms had their *shape* unchangeably; the fundamental particles of modern physics – quarks and so on – don't of course have shapes at all, in any literal sense, though they do have other intrinsic properties (like spin, charge and 'colour') unchangeably. And ultimately, or so we are led to believe, it is in terms of such properties of such particles, together with the relations of such particles to one another, that the whole macroscopic physical realm is to be explained. (Lewis himself concedes, without seeing the significance of so doing, that fundamental particles may well 'have no accidental intrinsic properties' (p. 205, note 6).) In short: modern physics offers us a solution to the problem of change which renders superfluous Lewis's solution in terms of temporal parts. Indeed, in comparison with the scientific solution, Lewis's 'solution' has all the hallmarks of the sort of pseudo-explanation that used to give philosophy a bad name.

*University of Durham,
50 Old Elvet,
Durham DH1 3HN.*

© E. J. LOWE 1987

ON KNOWLEDGE OF THE UNKNOWABLE

By TIMOTHY WILLIAMSON

IF it is an unknown truth that p , it is an unknowable truth that it is an unknown truth that p (cf F. B. Fitch, 'A logical analysis of some value concepts', *The Journal of Symbolic Logic* 28, 1963, pp. 135–42, at p. 138). It follows, by classical logic, that if all truths are knowable then all truths are known. This hardish fact makes life difficult for the verificationist who wishes to assert that all truths are knowable, but to deny that all truths are known. He might try rejecting classical logic (cf. my 'Intuitionism disproved?', *ANALYSIS* 42.4, October, 1982, pp. 203–7). Dorothy Edgington has recently suggested a different way out (cf. 'The paradox of knowability', *Mind* 94, 1985, pp. 557–68). She admits that there are unknowable truths in the sense of Fitch's argument, but interestingly revises the verificationist principle, to give it this form: if, in