

On Staying the Same

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According to David Lewis, something '*endures* iff it persists by being wholly present at more than one time'. (1986: 202) Lewis claims that the 'problem of temporary intrinsics' (PTI, henceforth) is a decisive objection against endurance: '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. ... How is such change possible?' (1986: 203-4) Robin Le Poidevin explicates the difficulty this way: 'Among the set of past facts is Fa; among the set of present facts is Not-Fa. So reality contains two facts, Fa and Not-Fa, which together form a contradiction'. (1998: 38) Lewis's alternative is 'Perdurantism': ordinary material things persist by having parts that exist at different times. Temporary intrinsics belong to different temporal parts. Lewis is bent in the derived sense that he has a part that is bent simpliciter; he sits and stands much as a road is both straight and windy because it has a straight part and a windy part.

One way to defend Endurantism against PTI is to deny that shapes are intrinsic properties. Lewis, setting out this view, writes:

[C]ontrary to what we might think, shapes...are disguised

relations, which an enduring thing may bear to times. One and the same enduring thing may bear the bent-shape relation to some times, and the straight-shape relation to others. In itself, considered apart from its relation to other things, it has no shape at all. And likewise for all other seeming temporary intrinsics...(1986: 204)

Lewis finds this view 'incredible': 'If we know what shape is, we know that it is a property, not a relation'. (1986: 204) Peter van Inwagen has different intuitions, however:

And I do maintain this. To say that Descartes had the property of being human is to say that he had that property at every time at which he existed. To say that he had the property of being a philosopher is to say that he had that property at every member of some important and salient class of moments--his adult life. (1990: 250)

Can we do better than butt intuitions? Here is a difficulty for the 'Relational View' (provisionally the view that seeming intrinsics are really relations to times¹). If Descartes is a

¹The Relational View (RV) cannot plausibly exclude non-temporary 'intrinsics.' If your occasional hairiness is a relation to times, so is my perpetual hairiness. Also, it is implausible that essential 'intrinsics' are intrinsics but accidental ones are not. If I am always human and hairy, and the latter feature is a relation to times, so is the former. A final definition of RV appears below.

philosopher at 21, at 22, and so on until he dies at age 54, plainly there is a feature (G) that he has from 21 to 54 because of this fact, one he might have had for a shorter or a longer span (e.g. he would have had it for a shorter span if he had died at 53, a longer span if he had lived to be a philosopher at 55). This phenomenon is one an account of properties should save. Of course Descartes carries along from 21 to 54 the feature of being a philosopher at 21, but not because he is a philosopher from 21 to 54. Nor is G the feature of being a philosopher at some time or other; he would have had that from 21 until 54 even if he had abandoned philosophy at 23. Nor is G being a philosopher from 21 to 54; for Descartes might have enjoyed G until 75 (if he had shunned Swedish winters), and he would have had it longer because he would have kept on doing philosophy. Nor is G being a philosopher all of his adult life; for Descartes would have had G longer if he had also been a philosopher from 12 to 20, but he would not have had longer the feature of being a philosopher all of his adult life. Nor is G the feature of being a philosopher for many years. For the property Descartes has from 21 to 54 is one he would have had only from 21 to 24 if he had shifted to portrait painting at 25. A strongly counter-intuitive consequence of RV is that G does not exist.

Of course G is the property of being a philosopher

simpliciter. The difficulty iterates for other temporary
intrinsic, like being bent simpliciter. Once we allow that there
are such accidental properties there is no reason to deny that
there are essential intrinsic properties, like being human
simpliciter. Note that the difficulty also arises for relational
properties like living in India, which I had from 30 to 32. If we
insist that this is really a three-place relation, one term of
which is a time, we are left without enough relations to go
around. RV is best defined as the thesis that all properties,
whether seeming intrinsic or relations, are relations to times.

In short, a difficulty for RV is that it leaves us without
enough properties to ascribe one wherever a feature plainly
persists. As a principal point of 'property talk' is to enable us
to do just that, on its face RV is a mistaken account of
properties. The defense is unpersuasive that we believe in G
because we fail to realize that 'Descartes is a philosopher' is an
abbreviated relational claim. It is hard to believe that we
believe in G simply because we are 'bewitched by language'.
Consequently RV cannot rescue enduring things from the problem of
temporary intrinsic.

Friends of the Relational View might respond that RV is
justified anyway because the alternative, Perdurantism, is even
more counter-intuitive. G turns out to be a temporary intrinsic,

all of which must be jettisoned to keep Endurantism afloat.² However the above discussion raises a deeper question: given RV, is Endurantism worth saving? For consider: A property-instantiation cannot survive the demise of the thing that has the property. To illustrate with a perdurantist example, a temporal series of momentary philosophers cannot 'stay the same' in the way that Descartes remains a philosopher from 21 to 54. For no instantiation of the feature of being a philosopher persists, and the series itself is a philosopher only in the derivative sense that its parts are philosophers simpliciter. (Indeed, Perdurantism precludes G; for the property of having a temporal part which is a philosopher is one that Descartes would have had from 21 until 54 even if he had given up philosophy at 22. And so on...) The same thing is true of a temporal series of momentary men; no instantiation of the property of being a man persists. Of course we do not think that properties merely have multiple instances; they also persist in individual things. The most important philosophical theory that flows from this conviction is that the

²Presentists believe they can save Endurantism by denying there are past facts. The present fact that I am straight is consistent with the present fact that I was bent. I do not think Presentism is viable (nor does Lewis), but I cannot go into that here. As I wish to show that RV fails as a defense of Endurantism even if there is no other defense, suppose for argument's sake that we must choose between Perdurantism and RV.

form Man explains me throughout my career because its original instantiation perpetuates *itself*. This requires an ontology of ordinary things that are wholly present at different times.

What Endurantism buys us are property instantiations that persist because the conditions for the property's instantiation continue to arise in the self-same thing. As the relation 'is a man at' (call it R) that relates Descartes and 21 is a property of its relata, R is instantiated anew at 22, at 23, and so on--much as, for the perdurantist, 'Man' is instantiated repeatedly in the temporal parts of Descartes that exist at 21, at 22, and so on. (Similarly if I dance with Alice, then Mary, then Sally, the relation 'dances with' is instantiated anew each time I change partners.) The claim that Descartes is a man all of his life, say, is reducible to the claim that, for some range of times t_1 through t_n such that Descartes does not exist before t_1 or after t_n , Descartes stands in R to t_1 , to t_2 , and so on to t_n . There is no persisting instantiation of R. Given RV, therefore, an ontology of enduring material things becomes idle. Properties, by their very nature, cannot persist in the metaphysically interesting way that Endurantism is meant to secure.³ As material change is a reason

³The endurantist might claim that Endurantism buys us something else which RV does not compromise. (If so, this paper's point is that, given RV, Endurantism is *less* worth saving.) The objection lacks force unless she produces that

independent of PTI to deny that ordinary things are wholly present at different times ('One cannot step in the same river twice, for the water is always new'), Endurantism remains embattled even if RV is accepted. We are left with an idle and problematic ontology.

By contrast, a series of momentary men avoids both the problem of material change and PTI, and it is not meant to bear persisting instantiations of properties which, it turns out, cannot exist if it does. Indeed, such a series is consistent with the existence of intrinsic properties--an advantage, for we can accept a simpler and more intuitive account of properties than RV. In short, if Descartes is a philosopher at 21, at 22, and so on until 54, but there is no feature G, the reasonable conclusion is that he is made of temporal parts.⁴

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'something else.' It cannot be that Endurantism better satisfies our intuitions about how ordinary things persist; RV's conjunction with Endurantism is quite counter-intuitive.

⁴ The presentist (see note 2, above) would say that there is presently a feature G that Descartes had from 21 through 54 because he was a philosopher from 21 through 54, which he could have had for a longer or a shorter span. If there is no G, therefore, Presentism is false and cannot serve as an alternative to Perdurantism. Thanks to Berit Brogaard and Judith Crane for helpful comments and discussions.

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