

FOREWORD

Some entities—perhaps all entities—have spatial parts, parts whose spatial location does not coincide with that of the whole. My hands are spatial parts of my body in this sense, and from my window I can only see part of the parade, not all of it. Some entities have temporal parts, too, or so we are inclined to say. The first inning is a temporal part of a ball game in this sense—it occupies a shorter stretch of time, and much more will have to happen before the game is over.

The analogy between spatial and temporal parts may be obvious in some cases, especially if time is construed as just another dimension on a par with the three spatial dimensions. But whereas philosophers tend to agree on the idea that ordinary objects and events are spatially extended, and thus have spatial parts, there is controversy concerning their temporal status. On the one hand are philosophers who maintain that all such entities are temporally extended in a literal sense; all such entities persist through time by having different temporal parts at different times just as they all extend across space by having different spatial parts at different places. In this sense, material objects are not to be distinguished from events: my body during its first year of existence is a temporal part of my whole, temporally extended body just as the first inning is a temporal part of the whole, temporally extended game. On the other hand are philosophers who deny this. According to such philosophers *some* spatially extended entities, such as processes and other events, have temporal parts. Other entities do not; they persist through time by being wholly and completely present at any moment at which they exist at all. This is typically said to hold of the sort of entities that qualify as ordinary material objects—such as my hand and my body. At least it is said to hold of objects that live a life of their own—such as people and animals and plants. Objects such as these are said to lack any temporal parts even if they are not—in any ordinary sense of the word—instantaneous. They are continuants: they persist by continuing to exist.

The dispute between these two opposing views is hardly a matter of terminology. It concerns the nature of a large portion of our common-sense picture of the world, and genuine controversy appears to arise as soon as we project one view or the other onto that picture. Nor is the dispute one that has been equally represented among contemporary philosophers. For quite a while the view that material objects are three-dimensional continuants has been regarded as the obvious view, naturally flowing out of our preanalytical intuitions and therefore hardly in need of any elaboration. Accordingly, defenders of the opposing view

have been concerned mostly with the task of proving themselves worthy, arguing that the conception of material objects as four-dimensional bodies extended in space and time involves no rejection of common sense. Partly as a result of such arguments, however, and partly in response to independent metaphysical concerns, both camps now agree that there is more at issue than common sense. The choice between three- and four-dimensionalism appears to have deep implications, for instance, for such questions as the nature of change, the possibility of spatio-temporal coincidence, the doctrine of Humean supervenience, or the puzzles associated with the idea of a merging and splitting of substances. It has ramifications in the dispute between presentism (the thesis that only present objects exist) and eternalism (all things existing at any time are equally real). It requires that serious thought be given to contemporary theories of space-time, such as special and general relativity. It also calls for a better understanding of the logical form of many ordinary-language expressions, as when we speak of the later Wittgenstein, or when we say that the Venus of last night is the same as the Venus of this morning. This issue of *The Monist* is devoted to an exploration of these and related questions, in an effort to provide material toward an assessment of, and to raise new challenges for, what is becoming one of the central debates in current metaphysics.

Achille C. Varzi
Columbia University