

## *Non-Individuals*

E. J. Lowe

*Abstract*

An *individual*, as this term will be understood here, is an entity that possesses both *unity* and determinate *identity*. That is to say, an entity  $x$  is an *individual* just in case (1)  $x$  is unambiguously *one* entity — a ‘unit’ — of its kind and (2)  $x$  is such that there is a determinate fact of the matter as to *which* entity of its kind  $x$  is. As a consequence of (2), if  $x$  is an individual, then it is always determinate, for any given entity  $y$  of  $x$ ’s kind, whether or not  $x$  is identical with  $y$ . It will be observed that this characterization of individuality — which, I would urge, is fully consonant with metaphysical tradition ever since its roots in antiquity — implies that any individual must be an individual *of some kind*: there are and can be no ‘bare’ individuals.

It is important not to confuse or conflate the notion of an individual with that of a *particular*, where the latter is contrasted with a *universal*. Universals, including *kinds* or (at least in one sense of the term) *species*, are eligible to be regarded as individuals, quite as much as particulars are. Furthermore, it would be a mistake to suppose that all individuals are necessarily *concrete* entities, as opposed to *abstract* ones. Certain mathematical entities, for instance, can be regarded as individuals. Consequently, spatiotemporal and causal characterizations of individuality are inadequate, since they lack the generality required to capture this notion.

Many philosophers assume, explicitly or implicitly, that *all* entities are individuals in the foregoing sense, and indeed that it is a necessary truth that they are. But this can certainly be disputed. It is, very arguably, both logically and metaphysically possible for there to be *non*-individuals, that is, entities which fail to satisfy either clause (1) or clause (2) — or both — of the foregoing definition of an ‘individual’. The aim of this paper will be to clarify the notion of a non-individual, propose a typology of non-individuals, and illustrate the notion’s potential for application within and across the sciences, by means of putative examples. This is an enterprise in which analytic metaphysics and theoretical science can, it is to be hoped, cooperate fruitfully and without mutual hostility or rivalry, to the benefit of both.