Eventual Permanence

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Some statements are true now and will be true from now on. Such statements are permanently true. This kind of claim figures prominently in reasoning about such diverse topics as games, natural resources, and cosmology. The significance of the notion of presently permanent truth has long been realized. It is in fact just the Diodorean conception of necessity, a notion which has been widely and thoroughly examined (see [3] and [4]).

Some statements, while not permanently true now, will sooner or later become permanently true. Claims with this modal status also figure prominently in reasoning about many diverse topics. For example, it is not now true that our oil reserves are exhausted. However, eventually it will be true that these reserves are permanently exhausted.[1]

The usefulness of the concept mentioned in the preceding paragraph extends to circumstances where the concern is not with universal permanence, but with what is permanent in a system. Games yield many examples of this kind. At a certain move in a chess match, the statement, "White has no Queen," may be false. Yet, it may also be true, because of the arrangement of the pieces on the board, that it will eventually be permanently true that White has no Queen. Relative to that move in that particular chess game, the statement, "White has no Queen," will eventually be permanently true.

These examples suggest that the concept of eventual permanence is a significant and useful one. Unlike Diodorean necessity, however, the idea of eventual permanence has been largely neglected. The only exception to this pattern of neglect with which I am familiar is Rescher and Urquhart's treatment of "Marxist necessity" ([4], pp. 135-137). Their discussion, while correct as far as it goes, is admittedly inconclusive on an important point which will be discussed below. Moreover, they restrict their investigation to a special case, a case which is not necessarily the most interesting or significant. My aim in this paper is to begin where Rescher and Urquhart leave off and to give a more