Most contemporary metaphysicians are sceptical about the reality of familiar objects such as dogs and trees, people and desks, cells and stars. They prefer an ontology of the spatially tiny or temporally tiny. Tiny microparticles “dogwise arranged” explain the appearance, they say, that there are dogs; microparticles obeying microphysics collectively cause anything that a baseball appears to cause; temporal stages collectively sustain the illusion of enduring objects that persist across changes. Crawford L. Elder argues that all such attempts to “explain away” familiar objects project downwards, on to the tiny entities, structures and features of familiar objects themselves. He contends that sceptical metaphysicians are thus employing shadows of familiar objects, while denying that the entities which cast those shadows really exist. He argues that the shadows are indeed really there, because their sources – familiar objects – are mind-independently real.

Crawford L. Elder is Professor and Head of the Philosophy Department at the University of Connecticut.
Familiar Objects and their Shadows

Crawford L. Elder
University of Connecticut
To the memory of
J. N. Findlay (1903–1987)
my philosophical father
Contents

Acknowledgments xi

Introduction 1
1 Two false friends of an ontology of familiar objects 7
  1.1 The point of affirming kind-sameness 9
  1.2 The point of affirming numerical persistence 12
  1.3 Pushmipullyu representations 13
  1.4 Explosivism 19
  1.5 Conventionalism 25
  1.6 Summing up 28
2 Conventionalism as ontological relativism 30
  2.1 Sameness and objects 32
  2.2 The “softness” of sameness in kind and numerical sameness 36
  2.3 Carving out strange kinds 39
  2.4 Carving out strange individuals 44
  2.5 The world onto which we project kind-sameness and persistence 48
  2.6 We who project kind-sameness and persistence 52
3 Realism about material objects: persistence, persistence conditions, and natural kinds 54
  3.1 Realism and mind-independent persistence conditions 55
  3.2 Nonqualitative persistence conditions? 57
  3.3 Qualitative persistence conditions 60
  3.4 Apparent departures from a natural kind 62
  3.5 Infimae species 66
4 Ontological preference for the temporally small 70
  4.1 An explosion of temporal counterpart relations? 72
  4.2 Restricting the t-counterpart relations that really obtain: first attempt 76
Contents

4.3 Restricting the t-counterpart relations that really obtain: second attempt 79
4.4 “Nonsupervenient” t-counterpart relations 81
4.5 Motivations for exdurantism 83
5 Ontological preference for microphysical causes 88
5.1 Three threats to mental causation 88
5.2 Causation and exceptionless laws 90
5.3 Causation, invariance, and beliefs and desires 93
5.4 Causal exclusion I: complex events at the level of the microparticles 100
5.5 Causal exclusion II: complex events at the level of neurochemistry 107
5.6 The problem of mental quausation 112
6 Ontological preference for the spatially small 114
6.1 Just where does “dogwise arrangement” obtain? 118
6.2 Causal competition between dogs and microparticles dogwise arranged 124
6.3 Why “more and less different from” is not defined over the microphysical events that subvene dog behaviors 128
6.4 Chains of causation involving microparticle events 131
6.5 Summing up 137
7 A third false friend of familiar objects: universal mereological composition 139
7.1 The Sider/Lewis argument for UMC 142
7.2 Two forms of UMC objects, two forms of strangeness 148
7.3 The properties that characterize UMC objects 151
7.4 Why contrariety fails to obtain 158
7.5 UMC and mereological essentialism 162
8 Concluding Hegelian postscript 166
8.1 Hegel and contemporary scepticism about familiar objects 166
8.2 Hegel on property-identity: the crucial place of graded contrast with contraries 168
8.3 Objections to the Hegelian position 181

Appendix: “Mutually interfering” dimensions of difference 190
References 195
Index 200
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