



The Structure of Objects

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(p.ix) Preface

The main purpose of this book is to give an analysis of ordinary material objects, those material objects to which we take ourselves to be committed in ordinary, scientifically informed discourse. In pursuing this task, I want to focus in particular on the question of how the *parts* of such objects, assuming that they have parts, are related to the *wholes* which they compose. That most, or possibly all, ordinary material objects have parts I take to be an obvious intuitive datum: we would commonly say, for example, that among the parts of a tree are its branches, its trunk, its leaves and its roots; among the parts of a table are its legs and its top; among the parts of an H₂O molecule are its two hydrogen atoms and its single oxygen atom. As I understand it, then, to ask the question, “What *are* ordinary material objects?”, is at least in part to ask, “How are these wholes related to the parts that compose them?”, or “What is the nature of the relations of *parthood* and *composition* for material objects?”.

Many philosophers today find themselves in the grip of an exceedingly deflationary conception of what it means to be an object, according to which any plurality of objects, no matter how disparate or gerrymandered, itself composes an object, even if the objects in question fail to exhibit interesting similarities, internal unity, cohesion or causal interaction amongst each other. To illustrate, according to this approach, George W. Bush's left hand together with the Eiffel Tower compose a further object, their sum, aggregate or fusion, which is partially located in the White House and partially located in Paris. The commitment to such initially counterintuitive objects follows from the belief that no principled set of criteria is available by means of which to distinguish the intuitively gerrymandered objects from the commonsensical ones; my project in this book is to persuade the reader that systematic principles by means of which composition can be restricted can be found and hence that we need not embrace this deflationary approach to the question of what it means to be an object.

To this end, I develop in what follows a more full-blooded neo-Aristotelian account of parthood and composition according to which objects are structured wholes: it is integral to the existence and identity of an object, on this conception, that its parts exhibit a certain manner of arrangement. For example, in order for there to be an H₂O molecule, the two hydrogen atoms and one oxygen atom that compose it must be arranged in the particular manner of chemical bonding, which requires the atoms in question to share electrons. This structure-based conception of parthood and composition, along with some of its historical precursors as well as some of its contemporary competitors, are explored in detail below.

The material put forth in this book, over the years, has been presented at numerous talks and conferences and has benefited from the help of many **(p.x)** friends and colleagues. I express my gratitude to: Jody Azzouni, Lynne Rudder Baker, David Barnett, Nancy Bauer, Karen Bennett, Hagit Borer, Tyler Burge, Myles Burnyeat, Alex Byrne, Vince Cheng, Elijah Chudnoff, Dan Dennett, Harry Deutsch, Cian Dorr, Steve Downes, Betsy Duquette, Delia Graff Fara, Michael Fara, Michael Ferguson, Malcolm Forster, Cody Gilmore, Michael Glanzberg, Ned Hall, John Hawthorne, Chris Heathwood, Mark Heller, Benj Hellie, Christopher Hitchcock, Hud Hudson, Ray Jackendoff, Robin Jeshion, Ed Johnson, Jeff King, Christian Lee, Tucker Lentz, Janet Levin, Andrew Loxley, Kirk Ludwig, Ned Markosian, Jim Mazoué, Kris McDaniels, Brad Monton, Michael Nelson, Bob Pasnau, Laurie Paul, Jim Pryor, Greg Ray, Mark Richard, Nathan Salmon, Barry Schein, Ori Simchen, Peter Simons, Jim Stone, Leopold Stubenberg, Zoltan Szabo, Jan Szaif, Paul Teller, Mariam Thalos, Achille Varzi, Kadri Vihvelin, Ralph Wedgwood, Jessica Wilson and Dean Zimmerman. I have found my conversations with Kit Fine, Graeme Forbes, Verity Harte, Mark Johnston, Elijah Millgram and Ted Sider, as well as my engagement with their work, to be particularly influential in developing the philosophical approach presented here. Thanks also to an anonymous reader for Oxford University Press for helpful comments.

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Portions of the material contained in this book are based on previously published work as follows. Chapter II contains some excerpts from Koslicki (2003a). Chapter III presents an expanded version of Koslicki (2005a). Chapter IV

appeared in print as part of Koslicki (2007). Chapter V substantially elaborates on my condensed remarks in Koslicki (2004b) concerning Plato's mereology and its interpretation in Harte (2002). My take on Aristotle's mereology, as laid out in Chapter VI, was especially developed for this monograph; a small portion of it is incorporated into Koslicki (2006b) and (2007), the latter of which also makes use of some of the results I reach in Chapter V and Chapter VII. Chapters VIII and IX are completely new. I am grateful to *Philosophical Studies*, the *Journal of Philosophy* and *Dialectica* for allowing me to reproduce previously published material.

The intended audience for this book consists of anyone who is intrigued by the question of how best to analyze the notions of part, whole and object. It presupposes only a minute amount of basic logic, much less than would be **(p.xi)** imparted to a typical undergraduate philosophy major. With the heavy emphasis on Plato's and Aristotle's mereology, I hope that my project will also speak to those with a historical inclination. Finally, parts of this book, especially the discussion of natural kinds in Chapter VIII and that of structure in Chapter IX, touch on issues that are of relevance not only to metaphysicians, but also to philosophers of language and semanticists, epistemologists, philosophers of science, linguists, psychologists, and cognitive scientists in general.

K. K. **(p.xii)**

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