

FOREWORD

This issue of *The Monist* is devoted to the metaphysics of lesser kinds, which is to say those kinds of entity that are not generally recognized as occupying a prominent position in the categorial structure of the world. Why bother? We offer two sorts of reason.

The first is methodological. In mathematics, it is common practice to study certain functions (for instance) by considering limit cases: What if $x=0$? What if x is larger than any assigned value? Physics, too, often studies the (idealized) initial and boundary conditions of a given system: What would happen in the case of a perfect *sphere*, or a perfectly *black body*? In the cognitive sciences, research often thrives on the analysis of cognitive *errors*, perceptual *illusions*, brain *pathologies*. Also in logic one can learn a lot by studying special, anomalous scenarios such as those exhibited by the *paradoxes*: it is unlikely that we actually find ourselves in a soritical context, or in a liar-like situation, but the fact that we might—or simply the fact that we can conceive of such a possibility—is important enough to deserve careful consideration. In short, the odd, the unfamiliar, the extra-ordinary, the limit cases are perfectly at home in scientific and more broadly intellectual discourse at various levels, where they can be fruitfully engaged in a sophisticated way (witness the existence of specific confining and managing strategies for dealing with them); and they are important precisely because they instruct us concerning the normal, the obvious, and the paradigmatic. The same goes for metaphysics, we submit. Although its major concern is, naturally, with such core entities as substances, properties, or hunks of solid matter, a lot may be learned by paying attention to those limit cases where we find ourselves dealing with entities of much lesser kinds, whether real or putative. A sound, a shadow, a hole, a surface, a hiccup. What sort of things are these, if any? And how do they fit into our general picture of the world? Admittedly, these are not important questions *per se*, especially when compared to the much more pressing issues that metaphysics has been dealing with since the early days of philosophy. Nonetheless they provide challenging limit cases for testing our metaphysical theories and their epistemological underpinnings. If daily objects are the paradigm source of intuition, then entities of lesser kinds—oftentimes parasitic upon the paradigm, be it conceptually or existentially—

provide a fresh supplement of intuitions to enlarge or refine our palette of metaphysical categories. And in the long run, dealing with such limit cases may produce novel perspectives and useful feedback for dealing with the core cases, precisely as in other fields of inquiry.

The second motivation is more of a theoretical sort. Surely any realist project in metaphysics ought to aim at completeness, so one should not be dismissive of the lesser. But the same goes for descriptive projects. Descriptive metaphysics—the enterprise of charting the territory of our pre-reflective ontological commitments—can hardly be satisfied with an incomplete map, not only because of the sheer curiosity to explore all areas, but also because of the conceptual nature of the territory. The usefulness of the map would be seriously affected if important conceptual connections were missed out. Open questions abound here. It may turn out, for instance, that the central concept of an object and the concept of an event are two faces of the same coin; not charting events properly may therefore hinder significant facts about objects. Conversely, interesting unifying hypotheses may lead us to look for hitherto uncharted features of those concepts that lie at the periphery, such as our concepts of a shadow, a hole, a surface, and so on. Moreover, there is a general, long-term question concerning the reasons why our conceptual structure has the shape it has, and why certain entities figure in it more prominently than others. Here is where metaphysical theorizing brings us to the interface between philosophy and cognition. And here a lot can be learned, too, concerning the role of intuition in metaphysics—a much under-examined role, by our lights, in descriptive and in realist projects alike.

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