

## Paper Abstracts

### Publications: Metaphysics

#### Presentist Perdurance and Parthood

*Philosophical Perspectives*, Forthcoming

Some philosophers want to combine Presentism with perdurance. For instance, one may want to endorse the claim that, though Presentism is true, there's still a completely natural divide between things like you that persist three-dimensionally, and entities like events that persist four-dimensionally. This paper explores whether there's an intuitive way to allow for this combination, while allowing for a very broad conception of perdurance, not giving up the spirit behind Weak Supplementation, not appealing to non-existent parts, and without fragmented reality or a pluralistic mereology.

#### The Overlap Problem

*Philosophical Studies*, 2021

It is common to think that it's possible for entities to spatially coincide in multiple ways: with overcrowding (as with two bosons located in the same region, not made of anything in common), and without overcrowding (as with a statue and a lump of clay). Typically, we can distinguish between these by claiming that uncrowded spatial overlap involves a sharing of parts, and crowded spatial overlap does not. However, if we think that mereologically unusual entities, such as extended simples or some kinds of gunk, can also spatially overlap in crowded and uncrowded ways, we lose the ability to distinguish between those varieties of spatial overlap via appeal to shared parts. Thus, we should either reject the possibilities that generated this difficulty, or we must look for an alternative explanation of these varieties of spatial overlap.

#### Fusion First

*Nous*, 2019

Logics of part/whole relations frequently take parthood or proper parthood as primitive, defining the remaining mereological properties and relations in terms of them. I argue from considerations involving Weak Supplementation for the conclusion that we should take fusion as our mereological primitive. I point out that the intuitions supporting Weak Supplementation also support a stronger principle, Weak Supplementation of Pluralities, and that the principle can only do the work demanded by our intuitions when formulated in terms of a notion of fusion that cannot be defined merely in terms of mereological properties and relations, logic, and a membership relation. So, insofar as we think any definition of fusion must be so restricted, we have motivation to take fusion as primitive; further, we have greater insight into the motivation for our supplementation principle and which version of that principle we ought to endorse.

#### Refining Four-Dimensionalism

*Synthese*, 2017

The current formulations of Four-Dimensionalism have this flaw: they either require needless commitments about the structure of time, or they require needless commitments about how liberally entities decompose into parts. Though we could respond to these issues by settling for a family of four-dimensionalist views each catered to the other views we endorse, this is unsatisfying: there seems to be something in virtue of which they all count as four-dimensionalist. That is, there seems to be some persistence-related natural feature (or group of features) that they all share, in virtue of which we put them in the same group. In this paper, I will demonstrate the problems with the current formulations of Four-Dimensionalism, and with their natural follow-ups. Then, I will present an alternative formulation that avoids these problems. My aim is to capture what is central to Four-Dimensionalism. Surprisingly, once we understand what it is to persist four-dimensionally, we will find that one does not need to posit temporal parts in order to be a four-dimensionalist.

### At It Again: Time-Travel and Motion

*Erkenntnis*, 2017

The At-At Account of motion is the extremely popular view that, necessarily, something moves if and only if it's at one place at one time, and at a distinct place at a distinct time. This, many believe, is all that motion consists in. However, I will present a case in which, intuitively, motion does not occur, though the At-At Account of motion entails that it does. I will then turn to the only tenable response that avoids revising the At-At Account: denying the possibility of my case. I will argue that the response is both contentious and fails to defend the spirit of the At-At Account qua reduction of motion (rather than mere listing of necessary and sufficient conditions for motion's occurring).

### Extensionality of Proper Part Containment

*Philosophical Quarterly*, 2017

Achille Varzi has shown us that it is harder to deny Extensionality than we may have thought: he has argued that if we define *proper parthood* as parthood with distinctness, cases that we take to violate Extensionality do not really involve sharing of all proper parts. Aaron Cotnoir has responded by showing that, if we instead define *proper parthood* as asymmetric parthood, we can take Extensionality to be violated in these cases. I will offer a new response to this argument: there are versions of Extensionality very similar to the one Varzi and Cotnoir discuss, which are violated in cases traditionally taken to be anti-Extensional, even when the traditional definition of *proper parthood* is endorsed. These slightly modified versions of Extensionality allow theorists to capture senses in which Extensionality is violated in these cases, without this *merely* amounting to a violation of Uniqueness of Composition.

### Placement Permissivism and Logics of Location

*Journal of Philosophy*, 2016

All of the current leading theories of location are parsimonious: they have at most one locative primitive, and the definitions of all of the other locative relations appeal to nothing beyond that primitive, mereological properties and relations, and basic logic. I argue that if we believe there can be extended, mereologically simple regions, we can construct cases that are incompatible with every possible parsimonious theory of location. In these cases, an object is contained within a simple region that is larger than the object; that is, there is some region,  $r$ , and some object,  $x$ , are such that every subregion of  $r$  fails to be completely free of  $x$ , yet  $x$  fails to fill  $r$ . I argue that

we ought to respond to this incompatibility by rejecting the analytic possibility of extended, simple regions.

### Fundamentality and Time-Travel

*Thought*, 2015

The relation of being *more fundamental than*, as well as the Finean notion of *partially grounds*, are widely taken to be irreflexive, transitive, and asymmetric. However, certain time-travel cases that have been used to raise worries about the irreflexivity, transitivity, and asymmetry of *proper part of* can also be used to argue that *more fundamental than* and *partially grounds* do not have these formal properties. I present this worry and discuss several responses to it, arguing that this problem is harder to address than the problem applied to proper parthood.

### Shaping Up Location: Against the Humean Argument for Extrinsicity of Shape

*Philosophical Studies*, 2015

Recently, we have been presented with an argument against the intrinsicity of shape that appeals to a plausible Humean principle. According to the argument, if shape is intrinsic and the location relation is fundamental, then we cannot explain the necessary correlation between an object's shape and the shape of its location. And, it is claimed, the Humean principle tells us that an unexplained necessary correlation like this one is unacceptable. In this paper I respond to this argument by rejecting the favored interpretation of the Humean principle. Sometimes there are truths about what it means to stand in a given relation, even when that relation has no analysis. And these truths entail that certain features are had by the relata of the relation. Lacking an explanation for these sorts of truths is not problematic. I argue that it is plausible to take is located at to be such a relation.

### Reasoning Without the Principle of Sufficient Reason

*The Puzzle of Existence: Why is There Something Rather Than Nothing?* 2013

According to Principles of Sufficient Reason, every truth (in some relevant group) has an explanation. One of the most popular defenses of Principles of Sufficient Reason has been the *presupposition of reason* defense, which takes endorsement of the defended PSR to play a crucial role in our theory selection. According to recent presentations of this defense, our method of theory selection often depends on the assumption that, if a given proposition is true, then it has an explanation, and this will only be justified if we think this holds for *all* propositions in the relevant group. I argue that this argument fails even when restricted to contingent propositions, and even if we grant that there is no non-arbitrary way to divide true propositions that have explanations from those that lack them. Further, we can give an alternate explanation of what justifies our selecting theories on the basis of explanatory features: the crucial role is not played by an endorsement of a PSR, but rather by our belief that, *prima facie*, we should prefer theories that exemplify *explanatory power* to greater degrees than their rivals. This guides our theory selection in a manner similar to *ontological parsimony* and *theoretical simplicity*. Unlike a PSR, our belief about explanatory power gives us a *prima facie* guiding principle, which provides justification in the cases where we think we have it, and not in the cases where we think we don't.

### Repeatable Artwork Sentences and Generics – with Jake Ross

*Art and Abstract Objects*, 2012

We seem to talk about repeatable artworks, like symphonies, films, and novels, all the time. We say things like, "*The Moonlight Sonata* has three movements" and "*Duck Soup* makes me laugh". How are these sentences to be understood? We argue against the simple subject/predicate view, on which the subjects of the sentences refer to individuals and the sentences are true iff the referents of the subjects have the properties picked out by the predicates. We then consider two alternative responses that involve reading these sentences as generics, similar to "The polar bear has four paws". The first response takes these sentences to be about kinds, and the second takes the relevant noun-phrases to act as predicates. We reject these accounts, but offer a third alternative which is informed by both, and which enables us to deny the existence of repeatable artworks while endorsing the truth of sentences seemingly about them.

### Multilocation and Mereology

*Philosophical Perspectives*, 2011

Multilocation and Minimal Mereology do not mix well. It has been pointed out that Three-Dimensionalism, which can be construed as multilocation-friendly, runs into trouble with Weak Supplementation. But in fact, regardless of one's theory of persistence, if someone posits the possibility of any one of several kinds of multilocation, he or she will not be able to maintain the necessity of any of the three axioms of Minimal Mereology: the Transitivity of Proper Parthood, the Asymmetry of Proper Parthood, and Weak Supplementation. In fact, positing even the mere conceivability of cases involving multilocation will require the denial of the analyticity of Minimal Mereology. In response to this, some have claimed that we ought to relativise parthood, either to one region or to two. Unfortunately, if we replace the axioms of Minimal Mereology with region-relativised counterparts, we will not be able to capture the intuitions that supported the original axioms. The only adequate solution, I maintain, is to restrict multilocation to a domain outside the scope of the rules we intuitively take to govern the parthood relation. For those who take Minimal Mereology to be necessary and universal, that will mean relinquishing the possibility of multilocation.

### Some Things About Stuff

*Philosophical Studies*, 2007

I examine the implications of positing stuff (which occupies an ontological category distinct from things) as a way to avoid colocation in the case of the statue and the bronze that constitutes it. When characterising stuff, it's intuitive to say we often individuate stuff kinds by appealing to things and their relations (e.g., water is water rather than gold because it is entirely divisible into subportions which constitute or partially constitute H<sub>2</sub>O molecules). I argue that if this intuition is correct, there are important restrictions on how we can characterise stuff in order to avoid collocated portions of stuff.

## **Publications: Philosophy of Religion**

### Simple Trinitarianism and Empty Names

*Religious Studies*, 2018

According to Simple Trinitarianism, God is mereologically simple (He has no parts distinct from Himself), and the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are not identified with any entities in our ontology. In this way, the Simple Trinitarian is able to avoid conflating Persons or multiplying Gods, and does not have to identify the Persons with minor entities or entities partly disjoint

from God, such as modes, events, or properties. However, in order to maintain that Trinitarian sentences are nonetheless true, our Simple Trinitarian will need a non-standard semantics. I explore just one option for this, which involves taking "the Father", "the Son", and "the Holy Spirit" to be empty names. By adopting a positive, Free Logic, we can take these names to make semantic contributions and play roles in true sentences, while blocking problematic inferences such as the one "The Father is God and the Son is God, and the Father is distinct from the Son" to "There are at least two Gods".

#### The Experiential Problem for Petitionary Prayer

*International Journal of Philosophy of Religion*, 2018

Sometimes we petition God for things through prayer. This is puzzling, because if God always does what is best, it is not clear how our prayers can make a difference to what God does. Difference-Making accounts of petitionary prayer attempt to explain how our prayers can nonetheless influence what God does. I argue that, insofar as one is motivated to endorse such an account due to wanting to respect widespread intuitions about this feature of petitionary prayer, they should also be motivated to endorse an account of prayer that respects widespread intuitions about other central features of petitionary prayer. I describe three problematic cases and the intuitions we have about them, and show how these intuitions restrict any Difference-Making account of petitionary prayer.

#### Atheistic Prayer

*Faith and Philosophy*, 2017

It is widely assumed that atheists cannot pray to God. Theists argue that "foxhole conversions", when atheists begin to pray when put in dire circumstances, show that atheists are prone to convert to theism (or were theists all along). Atheists argue that theists who ask for prayers from them are making inappropriate requests, for supplying those prayers is incompatible with atheism. In this paper, I argue against the assumption that atheistic prayer to God is impossible. I show that, just as one can direct communication toward someone even when they disbelieve that the person exists, one may direct prayers toward God while disbelieving that God exists. On my model of prayer, not only can atheists pray, but that atheistic prayer is on a par with theistic prayer in many more ways than one might expect.

#### Simple Trinitarianism and Feature-Placing Sentences

*Faith and Philosophy*, 2016

Some Trinitarians, such as Thomas Aquinas, wish to claim that God is mereologically simple; that is, God has no parts distinct from Himself. In this paper, I present *Simple Trinitarianism*, a view that takes God to be simple but, unlike Aquinas, does not identify the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit with anything in our ontology. Instead, the view incorporates resources used in metaphysical debates about Ontology to produce the right results for claims about the Persons of the Trinity. I will focus on just one possible semantics a Simple Trinitarian may give: taking Trinitarian claims to be translatable into feature-placing sentences, which are taken to posit property instantiation without requiring commitment to any objects that instantiate those properties.

#### Many-One Identity and the Trinity

*Oxford Studies in Philosophy of Religion*, 2012

Trinitarians claim there are three Divine persons each of which is God, and yet there is only one God. It seems they want three to equal one. It just so happens, some metaphysicians claim exactly that. They accept Composition as Identity: each fusion is identical to the plurality of its parts. I evaluate Composition as Identity's application to the doctrine of the Trinity, and argue that it fails to give the Trinitarian any options he or she didn't already have. Further, while Composition as Identity does give us a new way to assert polytheism, its help requires us to endorse a claim that undercuts any Trinitarian motivation for the view.

## **Drafts**

### Decompositional Plenitude

I present and motivate a new form of plenitude. According to Decompositional Plenitude, there is some object,  $x$ , that fuses some  $y$ s and yet has some part that is disjoint from each of the  $y$ s. This view opens new options for the sort of metaphysics we may endorse in a wide range of areas. For instance, it provides us with new responses to the Problem of the Many and to the Problem of Change (across time and across space), it helps us solve Russell's Paradox of Propositions and a related paradox applied to hylomorphism, and it allows us to describe cases we may posit if we accept liberalism about how things can decompose. More generally, it allows us to avoid having to select just one way things decompose among multiple, merely arbitrarily differing, at least partly disjoint alternatives. And even more strikingly, it allows us to posit multiple, at least partly disjoint decompositions in cases where those decompositions differ substantively, each capturing something important about the world. Finally, I argue that we can endorse Decompositional Plenitude with minimal cost if we also endorse a fusion-first mereology.

### Hylomorphic Change – with Maegan Fairchild

Jeffrey Brower has presented an Aristotelian account of change that has a structure similar to a temporal parts account, but which is friendly to Three-Dimensionalists. On this solution, temporary objects have temporary properties and persisting objects as parts, and persisting objects (in some sense) derive temporary properties from the temporary objects they are successively parts of. We raise a dilemma for this view: either the solution cannot account for facts about how objects change in parts over time, or it requires rejecting the claim that, for any object, if it has a part present at a region, then the object is partly present at the region. We explore how theorists who endorse a hylomorphic view of material objects may be able to reject some common connections between parts and places, but we argue that they will not have plausible grounds to reject the principle about partial location when applied to material objects.

### Resisting Rip-Current Resources

In academic settings, when encountering oppression we are often encouraged to work within the system to seek change. Even in the most well-intentioned circumstances, these options for assistance can be what I'll call rip-current resources. I provide a new analogy for a familiar concept, and compare it to similar resources provided for victims of abuse. I'll give examples of problematic resources and their effects, and then will give suggestions for how, within an academic setting, one may strive to be a positive and productive resource rather than a rip-current resource.

### Tensed Mereology Without Nonexistent Parts

In this paper I examine the details of how we may develop a tensed mereology that produces the right results for perdurers and endurers, without appealing to non-existent parts, and without requiring a pluralistic mereology or a fragmented reality. I will sketch multiple ways we may try to build up a mereology from tensed atomic propositions involving a mereological primitive. I'll identify choice-points for how truth of these tensed atomic facts relates to facts about existence, presence, and containment of the objects involved, and the implications for what our defined mereological relations (and the rules involving them) look like. Finally, I'll sketch my preferred tensed mereology, which is closely based on a relativized version..

### Conditional Desires

There's an intuitive distinction between two types of desires: conditional (desires for things such that we want to get them only as long as we'll still want them when we get them) and unconditional (desires for things that we want to get regardless of how we'll feel about them later). Derek Parfit has suggested that we interpret conditional desires as desires involving certain conditionals – that is, that we interpret them as being implicitly conditional upon their own persistence. While this account seems intuitive, I argue that it is incorrect. I examine several ways of cashing out conditional desires in terms of conditionals, and show problems with each. I then present a trilemma against this way of interpreting conditional desires, based on problems independent of those already mentioned. Finally, I conclude by noting that the problems I raise apply to a wide variety of accounts, not just those involving conditionals, which leaves us with an interesting puzzle: we have an intuitive, easily graspable distinction, and difficulty in accounting for it.